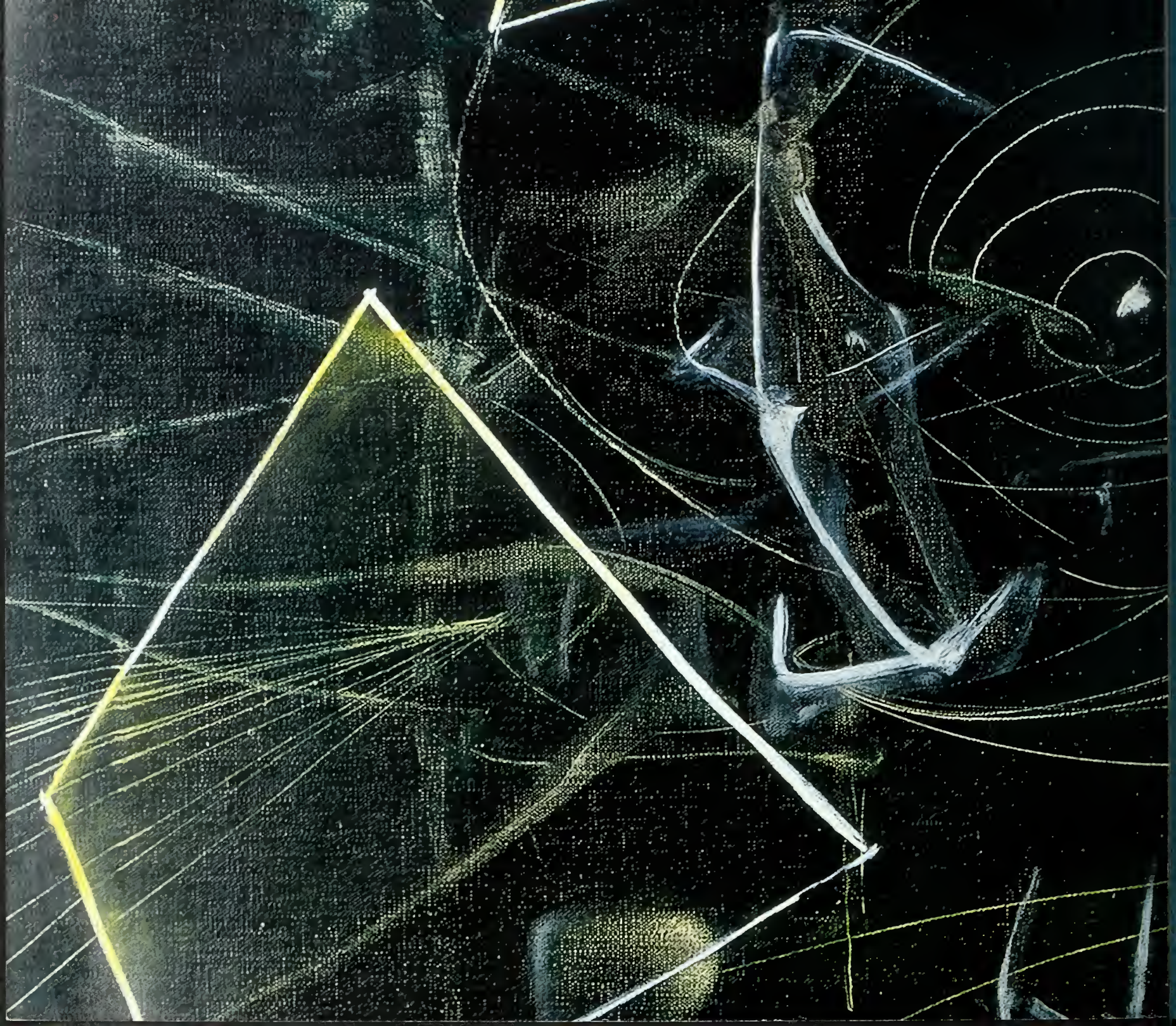
MATTA
Making the Invisible Visible
Edited by Elizabeth Goizueta · McMullen Museum of Art · Boston College



MATTA

Making the Invisible Visible

Edited by Elizabeth T. Goizueta

McMullen Museum of Art
Boston College

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This publication is issued in conjunction with the exhibition *Matta: Making the Invisible Visible*, organized by the Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College.

Principal Curator: Elizabeth Goizueta
Co-curators: Sarah J. Beckjord, Claude Cernuschi, Mary Schneider Enriquez, and Roberto Goizueta

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Front: Matta–*The Unthinkable*, 1957 Oil on canvas, 78 x 118 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

Back: Matta–*La Révolte des Contraires*, 1944, Oil on canvas, 38 x 51 in., Galeria Ramis Barquet, New York and J. Todd Figi

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Preface

Matta: Making the Invisible Visible was conceived by Elizabeth Goizueta, a faculty member who teaches Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. Through her work in Latin American studies, she had become familiar with several important collectors of paintings, drawings, and sculpture by Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echuarren (1912–2002), known as Matta, the most renowned artist of Latin American heritage and a major artist of the twentieth century. Hoping to organize at the McMullen an exhibition that would spur new appreciation for this artist's Latin American roots, Ms. Goizueta proposed to ask some of these collectors if they might lend. The Museum immediately embraced her plan with enthusiasm. The first collector approached, Thomas Monahan, who agreed to serve as a curatorial consultant for the exhibition, offered a large number of paintings, providing a core group of exceptional works. Then, when J. Todd Figi generously promised to lend an equally significant selection of works, what might have remained simply a good idea became a real possibility.

We then gathered a group of professors from the faculty who specialized in the art and culture of the twentieth century, especially in Latin America, to select additional key works and to pose new questions from various disciplines that the exhibition should address. To Lindy Bergman, Robert Bergman, Laurie O'Connor, Joan Nissman, Judith Nissman Taylor, Jim Winter, Carol and Mark Symons, Rock Walker, Auguste Uribe, Frederic Amar, and Christine Gilberti; Paul Haim, Dominique Haim Chanin, Mathilde Simian, and Astrid Fryns (Haim Chanin Fine Arts, New York); Nicholas Acquavella and Esperanza Sobrino (Acquavella Galleries, Inc.); Virgilio Garza (Galeria Ramis Barquet); Phillip Johnston, Maureen O'Brien, and Tara Emsley (Rhode Island School of Design); Joseph Ketner and Ben Thompson (Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University); Jude Palmese and Amy Louvier (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago); Kimerly Rorschach and Jennifer Widman Moyer (The Smart Museum, University of Chicago); Gabriela Palmieri (Sotheby's); and Tiffany Matula (James Goodman Gallery) we extend our heartfelt thanks. Their positive responses to our loan requests enabled us to persevere.

To bring this project to fruition required the dedication of a strong team of professionals, most notably the guest curators and Museum staff. Our greatest debt of gratitude is due the principal curator, Elizabeth Goizueta, who oversaw the selection of works and edited this catalogue with great discernment. We are indebted as well to each of the co-curators: Sarah Beckjord (Romance Languages and Literatures), Claude Cernuschi (Fine Arts), Roberto Goizueta (Theology), and distinguished scholar of Latin American art Mary Schneider Enriquez, all of whom contributed new views of Matta's significance within the culture of the twentieth century. The Museum's chief curator, Alston Conley, designed the exhibition with great sensitivity to show off the works to best advantage and to enhance the didactic vision of the curators. Our exhibition coordinator, Naomi Blumberg, played an invaluable role in editing and producing the catalogue, writing wall texts, and organizing

the exhibition; museum assistant/registrar John McCoy aided with loans and designed the website; student intern Adelina Jedrzejczak helped with editing and research; Naomi Rosenberg edited labels and wall text; art librarian Adeane Bregman created a bibliographic database on the artist; Mary Lou Crane aided with funding; Keith Ake designed this catalogue and accompanying materials; and James Mill undertook the layout and production of this book. We must also thank members of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Latin American Studies Program, especially Laurie Shepard, Franco Mormando, Debbie Rusch, Harry Rosser, and Dwayne Carpenter for their encouragement and support.

The tireless efforts of all these individuals are evident in this, the first retrospective to both address Matta's claim to having made the "invisible visible" and to "make visible" the Latin American influences that lend the artist's work its distinct aesthetic. Installed chronologically, the exhibition first examines how, in the 1930s, Matta grappled with the psyche and invented a visual language to evoke the subconscious. It then moves on to the 1940s, the War years, when Matta lived in New York City. It shows how he shifts from personal psychological "inscapes" to external landscapes, and how he reorients his iconography as a result of his growing interest in primitive and pre-Columbian art. The third section of the exhibition, focusing on the 1950s, explores how the artist incorporates figures in a geometric and planar space. And finally, in the remaining section, large works from the last three decades of Matta's life—a relatively unexamined period—show how Matta visualized his intense political beliefs, his fascination with the sciences, and his revolutionary ideas concerning the state of the world.

Such a complex project could not have been attempted were it not for the generosity of the administration of Boston College. We are grateful especially to president William P. Leahy S.J., academic vice-president John J. Neuhauser, associate dean of faculties Patricia DeLeeuw, and dean of arts and sciences Joseph Quinn. The Patrons of the McMullen Museum, chaired by C. Michael Daley, underwrote this catalogue and a major portion of the exhibition. Once again, our Patrons' dedication to the Museum has enabled us to realize our mission to mount scholarly exhibitions of international importance with works of the highest quality. To each of them we extend our deepest gratitude.

Nancy Netzer
Director and Professor of Art History

Totems and Taboos Revisited: Roberto Matta and the New World Tradition

Sarah H. Beckjord

In mapping Roberto Matta's place in modern art, the Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz suggests that, unlike many Latin Americans whose contributions to European literary and cultural movements went unrecognized, Matta's influence both in Parisian Surrealist circles in the late 1930s and in the New York art scene of the 1940s ran exceptionally deep (17). One consequence of Matta's early transcontinental success is that most assessments of his work focus largely on his connections to Paris or New York, while his links to Latin America have been less thoroughly examined. Although Paz and others have remarked that Matta's journey to Mexico in 1941 marked a turning point in his work—one in which, as Paz notes, he "leaves himself in order to find a world that he just discovered, a world that henceforth he never stopped exploring and inventing" (18)—the ways in which his work engages the imaginative and cultural tradition of Latin America merit further elaboration.[1] In this essay I will endeavor to draw parallels between a number of Matta's works and the broader context of transatlantic cultural exchange and syncretism. I will cast his work within the framework of a long line of efforts to capture the image of the "Other" that begins with the earliest European descriptions of the New World and intensifies after the 1920s with the avant-garde, Surrealist, and ethnographic interest in "primitive" and folk cultures.

Needless to say, placing an artist such as Matta within a regional or hemispheric tradition is something of an elusive task. As a Surrealist, Matta sought to transcend traditional notions of time, place, and space; his early work largely eschewed figurative representations in favor of landscapes of inner worlds. Even in later works, more generally populated with figures and often alluding to nightmarish realities in world events, one could say that a fantastic sort of psychological realism predominates. On another level, artistic exchange between the Old World and the New has always been a fascinatingly dynamic and multidirectional process. This sort of exchange can be seen in the title "Totems and Taboos," which I have borrowed from a 1968 exhibit in Paris where Matta showed his work with two other prominent Latin American artists (Wifredo Lam of Cuba and Alicia Pérez Penalba of Argentina). In his preface to the catalogue for that exhibition, André Berne Joffroy accentuates the primitive and the universal qualities of the artists' otherwise distinct aesthetic visions, while carefully avoiding any generalizations about the region: "To define Latin America," he writes, "is the affair of Latin Americans, and I will take no risks in the matter." Joffroy in turn alludes to Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913), where Freud presents the human unconscious as a definitive force in shaping the social, moral, and religious norms of all societies. The idea of the unconscious as a primal force was dear to the Surrealists, as was their interest in "primitive" cultures and liberation from social constraints. In the Latin American context, Freud's ideas had been playfully recast by Oswald de Andrade, a major figure of the Brazilian avant-garde of the 1920s, who in his

Fig. 1
Johann Froschauer, Single-leaf publication representing New World inhabitants as cannibals. Augsburg, 1505. (c) Collection of the New York Public Library.

"Anthropophagite Manifesto" (1928) revisits the "taboo" of cannibalism that had so fascinated early European travelers in the New World, as well as the *topos* that artistic creation in Latin America is but an inferior imitation of aesthetic trends in Europe. In his manifesto, Andrade advocates an artistic program based on cultural anthropophagy in which external influences are devoured and transformed into innovative autochthonous creations. The cultural heritage of colonialism, for Andrade, is the ability to "transform the taboo into totem" (17), that is, to create works of art that would both incorporate and flauntingly overcome the Western tradition.

A focus on totems and taboos in Roberto Matta's work enables one to situate him not only alongside the concerns common to the avant-garde and Surrealist movements of the twentieth century, but also with an even longer and more varied tradition of mutual borrowing between the Old World and the New. A number of Matta's works revisit the myths and traditions that grew out of early European descriptions of the New World and share their fascination with the strange and the monstrous. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century travelers to the New World sought to make their accounts of the unfamiliar territories and inhabitants believable to European audiences, and in the process drew on ancient and medieval narratives of fantastic beings in far-away places (Grafton 77-85). As in Homer's *Odyssey* or John Mandeville's *Travels*, the natives of these strange lands on the margins of the known world are described in terms of their transgressive behavior and uncontrolled appetites, contributing to the fascinating cultural enterprise that Edmundo O'Gorman has described as the "invention" of America (fig. 1). Columbus, in his diary of the first voyage, reiterates that everything about the islands to the West seems different from home ("disforme de lo nuestro"). He finds not the gold and spices expected by the Catholic Monarchs who had helped to finance his voyage, but rather a population that appears to live in prelapsarian simplicity. Although he admits not to have seen any monsters himself, he reports second-hand accounts of men with dog faces and of cannibals whose ferocious bites forever scar those who survive their attacks (Colón 65, 84). In a letter to Lorenzo de Medici, Amerigo Vespucci tells of strange native body piercing practices, noting that "if you were to see such an unusual and monstrous thing as a man with seven stones just in his cheeks or jaws or lips, some of them a half a palm long, you would be amazed." He further expresses his astonishment at the voracious sexual appetites of indigenous women, whose unending demands, he states, threaten to castrate their husbands (49). Antonio Pigafetta, who accompanied Magellan on his voyage around the world, relays descriptions of native cannibals, one of which he describes as so large as to be a "giant" with a "voice like a bull" (11).

Beginning in the 1940s, one finds that Matta frequently makes use of New World symbols and iconography in order to explore both taboos and totems in a new context. Like the early travel accounts, many of Matta's works from this period evince a fascination with the dangers and possibilities of human desires and proscriptions. For example, *La Femme Affamée* (1945, no. 15) would appear to fuse the myths of the dog-faced cannibal and the dangerously needy seductress. In this female-canine figure, whose famished jaws open as if to scream, Matta would seem to epitomize Andrade's notion of the taboo-turned-totem. *La sodomie (seul ou en bande)* (1944, no. 12) explores violence and sexual prohibitions, while *Flying People Eaters* (1942, fig. 2) with its fantastic donkey-like creatures and their leering toothy grins, hints somewhat humorously at the dark side of eros as appetite. *Les Suicidés* (1943–44) represents another sort of taboo, in this case one that hints at despair born of tyranny (a phenomenon decried by Bartolomé de las Casas in his polemical critique of the Spanish empire, Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies). In a text from

Fig. 2
Roberto Matta, *Flying People Eaters*, 1942. Wax crayon and lead pencil on paper. 57.8 x 72.4 cm.

1977, Matta alludes to ethnographic attempts to capture the "Other" as a sort of mirror for finding the self when he writes of the need "to overcome the fear of feeling strange in the world, of the strangeness that is a man, a woman, a madman, a white European, a black African, a yellow- or red-skin, the stranger that you are for them, the stranger that you are for yourself."[2]

But perhaps the most important source of inspiration in the New World context was pre-Columbian iconography and cosmology, for which Roberto Matta had an enduring passion. In the 1930s, ethnographic and anthropological studies of non-Western cultures flourished on both sides of the Atlantic, bringing new attention to the antiquities and cultural artifacts of Africa, Oceania, and pre-Columbian America, not just as foreign curiosities but as works of art in their own right. In 1933, the same year that the Musée d'Ethnographie de Trocadéro in Paris held a major exhibit of African works, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented "The American Sources of Modern Art," which showcased pre-Columbian works from Mexico, Central America, and the Andes, as well as works by contemporary artists. The catalogue essay for the New York exhibit highlights the work of *Fauves* and Cubists in Paris as a source for a heightened awareness of the abstract and formalist qualities and use of color in antiquities of Mexico and Peru (Cahill 7). In 1939, André Breton exhibited pre-Columbian works and Mexican folk art in Paris, and a year later, Matta himself participated in the International Exposition of Surrealism in Mexico City, organized by Breton, Wolfgang Paalen, and César Moro. This event juxtaposed the works of contemporary artists to pre-Hispanic and Oceanic objects, contemporary folk art, and the works of the insane (Barnitz 108). It was soon afterward that Matta would begin a life-long enthusiasm for collecting pre-Columbian objects. His son, Ramuntcho, notes that Matta began to collect antiquities in earnest in New York during the 1940s, and recalls that his father would frequently acquire the objects that he desired by exchanging them for his own works. Even late in life, his studio in Paris was populated by a phalanx of totemic figures from Oceania.[3]

Beginning in the 1940s, many of Matta's works employ vague references to pre-Columbian iconography, inspired perhaps by his fascination with Mayan codices and totemic imagery from a variety of sources. In *Children's Fear of Idols* (1943, no. 10), a nightmarish series of intersecting planes partially reveals mysterious totemic figures, and the more clearly defined warrior of *Je M'arche* (1949, no. 22) stares stonily at the viewer from amid a battlefield of chaotic and dangerous forces. The central figure in the much later *Threshold of Love* (1955, no. 29) recalls pre-Columbian gold antiquities from the Cauca region of present-day Colombia. And yet, Matta's rendering of New World mythology and iconography never ceases to be transformative. He constantly fuses together dissonant registers, as is typical of the Surrealists, in order to create an original vision. The indigenous motifs often appear morphed into insect-like figures that suffer or inflict suffering. Other totemic imagery reflects a keen interest in the possibilities and pitfalls of science, as in *A Grave Situation* (1946, no. 19) or *Woman looked at* (1949), where the harsh, geometric lines of the futuristic observer contrast with the vulnerable curves of its

object of scrutiny. In describing his work during this period, Matta wrote:

> I tried to use, not my personal morphology, but a social morphology. Using the totemic images in a situation which was more historical: the torture chambers and so on. I tried to pass from the intimate imagery, forms of vertebrae and unknown animals, very little known flowers, to cultural expressions, totemic things, civilizations (*A Totemic World*, n.pag.).

Matta's admiration for pre-Hispanic art would endure until the very end of his life. As late as 2000, he visited an exhibit of gold antiquities from Colombia entitled "Spirits, Gold and the Shaman" at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in Paris. He is said to have spent several hours in the exhibit, astonished by the imagery that represents the transformative processes undergone by indigenous shamans who acquire animal characteristics through ritual. Clara Isabel Botero, the Director of the Museo del Oro in Bogotá, who accompanied Matta at the gold exhibit in Paris, recalls that Matta was particularly struck by the imagery of birds, bats, and jaguars (figs. 3 and 4). Matta himself was, Botero recalls, something of "a shaman of the 20th-century."[4]

Matta's exploration of New World myths and iconography fits into a general trend among twentieth-century Latin American intellectuals who sought to uncover a literary and cultural tradition in the pre-Columbian and colonial heritage of Latin America. His close ties to several generations of novelists and poets began with his contact with the remarkable group of writers that were active in Spain in the years before Franco's fascist forces defeated the Republican cause. The tragic losses and forced exile of many during the civil war years created new bonds between Spanish intellectuals and their counterparts in the former American colonies. While living in Paris in the 1930s, Matta traveled to Spain several times and became acquainted with Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca, and fellow-Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, among others. It is said that Mistral introduced him to the work of Cuban poet and patriot José Martí, and, in particular, to the essay "Our America" (Day 114). In this essay, written when Cuba was still a Spanish colony in 1891, Martí argues for cultural independence and creative thinking in Latin America as the best defense against the "giant" empire to the North. He describes the colonial heritage of the hemisphere as one that has bred a hybrid people: "We were a phenomenon with the chest of an athlete, the hands of a dandy, and the brain of a child. We were a masquerader in English breeches, Parisian vest, North American jacket, and Spanish cap" (91). Martí's essay is full of audacious metaphors as he compares his people to leaves, to trees, and even to insects, when referring to those who

Fig. 3
Votive figure of a person smoking tobacco, Muisca, 600–1600 AD. Gold, lost wax technique. 8 x 3.4 cm. (c) Collection of the Museo del Oro, Banco de la República de Colombia.

Fig. 4
Pectoral in the shape of a bird-man, representing a shaman with his auxiliary animals . Cauca, 1000-1600 AD. Gold, lost wax technique, 16.5 x 12.1 cm. (c) Collection of the Museo del Oro, Banco de la República de Colombia.

lack faith in their country and have "arms of Paris or Madrid." Well versed in the painful experience of exile, he writes of the need to look to nature and to regional realities, including to the indigenous and African presence, for guidance in overcoming the dependency born of colonialism. In endeavoring to grapple with the implications of a mixed cultural heritage, Marti puts forth a challenge that is both political and artistic: "Let the world be grafted onto our republics, but the trunk must be our own" (88). One suspects that neither the challenge nor the hybridity of Martí's imagery were lost on Matta. The depth of his concern for the political fate of Latin American countries is evident in numerous works that comment on historical events, such as those decrying the coup against Salvador Allende in 1973. Matta also plays explicit homage to Marti as a link in a chain of literary "liberators" in his *El Verbo América*, a 1984 exhibit at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Havana of pastels inspired by ancient Aztec and Mayan motifs. He writes: "The American Verb is the recovery of events that are not told in stories...the artists of the different nations of America have broken down borders sooner than the politicians and the military: It is the sign of a continental consciousness Bolívar + Martí + Juárez + Darío + Macedonio + Mistral + Neruda + Zalamea + Carpentier + Asturias + Cortázar + García Márquez + Amado. Each and every one proposes in the Verb of America to write these premonitory signs in a continental language, in the creation of a language."[5] It would seem that Matta in his own work sought to create a visual language that would continue this explicitly Latin Americanist literary tradition.

Octavio Paz, one of the most eloquent commentators on Surrealism on either side of the Atlantic, hints at his importance in this regard. For Paz, Matta's work fuses "eroticism, humor and the new physics" so as to introduce "a non-figurative vision: his paintings are not the transcription of seen or dreamed realities, but recreations of animic and spiritual states. The invisible becomes visible, or more precisely, incarnated." With Matta's daring innovations, Paz suggests, "surrealist painting adventures into an unexplored region," (Paz 18). In his creation of a visual idiom of strange and imaginary worlds that problematizes relationships between the observer and the observed, Matta draws upon and expands the rich cultural heritage of Latin America, which has, as I have tried to suggest in this essay, a complex kinship with the Western tradition. Jorge Luis Borges once wrote that the situation of South Americans vis-à-vis the Western tradition was similar to that of the Jews in Western culture, or of the Irish in English culture. Although they act within that culture, "at the same time they do not feel tied to it by any special devotion." Borges continues: "I believe that...we South Americans in general, are in an analogous situation; we can handle all European themes, handle them without superstition, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have, fortunate consequences" (184). It is perhaps Matta's irreverent and non-superstitious treatment of the totems and taboos of modern culture that has gained him such a memorable place within contemporary art.

My appreciation to Clara Isabel Botero Cuervo, Roberto Benavente, and Ramuntcho Matta for generously sharing their recollections of Roberto Matta with me, and to the Museo del Oro del Banco de la República de Colombia for the kind permission to reproduce images of objects from their collection.

Notes

1 For recent attempts to view Matta in the Latin American context, see Dore Ashton "Surrealism and Latin America" in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century.* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993); J. Barnitz "Surrealism, wartime, and New World Imagery"; Dawn Ades, "Private Worlds and Public Myths" in *Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989); Juan A. Martinez, "Early 20th Century Latin American Vanguard Art: The Invisible Modernism" *Art Nexus* 1997 24:64–68.

2 "Modalitá d'uso: 'Agitar l'occhio prina de vedere'" *Matta.* Viterbo, Palazzo degli Alessandri. Trans. Isabelle Laverne and qtd. in *Matta,* 308. English trans. mine.

3 Interview with Ramuntcho Matta, October 22, 2003.

4 Interview with Clara Isabel Botero Cuervo, Director, Museo del Oro de Colombia, October 17, 2003.

5 "El Mediterráneo y El Verbo América" in *Matta: El Verbo América.* Le Habana: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Ministerios de Cultura de España y Cuba, 5. Qtd. in *Matta* 1985, 305, English trans. mine.

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The Artist as Poet:
Symbiosis between Narrative and Art in the Work of Matta

Elizabeth T. Goizueta

One of the most prolific artists of the twentieth century, Roberto Matta consistently employed visual metaphors influenced by rich literary traditions. His affinity for literature, particularly that of Spain and Latin America, may have been noted by scholars, but these texts have not heen mined for the resources that they provided him in the visual exploration of his art. His work reflects many influences, but these are almost exclusively attributed to other artists and artistic movements. To fail to recognize the role that literature and literary figures played in Matta's life is to have an unnuanced view of the evolution of his ideas. Additionally, Matta was unique in that, as a Latin American, he participated in and continued to influence many of the most important twentieth-century artistic and literary genres of North America and Europe, imparting ideas that historically tended to be subordinated to the more dominant colonial tradition. According to the Mexican writer and poet Octavio Paz, with whom Matta carried on a life-long friendship, few Latin Americans have had as intense and profound an influence on French contemporary art and literature as Matta:

> Relations between French culture and the writers and artists of Latin America have been, since the end of the eighteenth century, continuous and privileged, although almost always they have flowed in only one direction. Latin Americans have received, adopted, and transformed many French influences; in contrast, their response, interpretations and recreations seldom, except during our own time have been heard in France.... In isolated cases, nevertheless, Latin Americans have played a leading role in the literary and artistic life of Paris. Among the most notable examples, two Chileans, a poet and a painter: Vicente Huidobro and Roberto Sebastián Matta (23).

Born and raised in Chile, Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren left Chile for Spain in his early twenties to explore his ancestral roots. Among Matta's first contacts in Europe were Federico García Lorca, Salvador Dalí, Gabriela Mistral, and Pablo Neruda. His travels later took him to New York, Mexico, and South America. While in North America, he befriended Paz; during his extensive travels throughout South America he developed friendships with both Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar. Matta, whose surname translates as "he who recites poems, the poet shepherd" (Haim 73), saw himself as a visual poet using paint to give visual form to his prose. This essay will explore the symbiotic relationship between Matta and some of the renowned Spanish and Latin American literary figures of the twentieth century as well as their shared focus on narrative themes. Although Matta lived an itinerant life, with significant time spent on three continents, he explicitly admitted the enduring influence of Latin American cultures on his work. Likewise, Latin American literary friends recognized the influence of narrative poetry in Matta's work.

While Matta's rift with the Surrealists during his New York period has frequently been examined in light of the artist's scientific pursuits, this essay will aver that science may not be the exclusive cause of his alienation. Furthermore, Matta's

early and continuous identification with Spanish and Latin American literary writers and artists, specifically poets Lorca, Neruda, Mistral, and Martí (all of whom, in addition to their professions, exhibited talents in other areas), reflected the Latin American tendency toward an inclusive, pluralistic worldview characteristic of Latin American culture. This view, in turn, produced an aesthetic which manifests itself in multifaceted directions rather than limiting itself to dogmatic, exclusionary practices. The Surrealists' uneasiness with the figure, narrative themes, and scientific principles was inconsistent with Matta's vision of inclusiveness. Their rejection of the figurative in Matta's work presented him with a cultural dilemma. His faithfulness to his Latin American origins may have led, in part, to the divergence between his own artistic goals and those of the European Surrealists and the New York School, propelling him on a unique path of artistic accomplishment.

Aesthetic Myopia

To understand fully the extent to which Matta's work reflects a Latin American aesthetic, it is necessary to analyze his reception in the dominant art movements of the 1930s and 40s. While in Paris, despite his avid participation, Matta was never fully accepted into the European Surrealist community, nor into New York's European exile community, nor was he fully incorporated into the beginnings of the New York School of Abstract Expressionism. Given his unique position as the lone South American in these communities, Matta was an outsider. He employed a visual language that few understood, the language of a different reality born of his South American identity. He found invaluable support in gallery owner Sydney Janis, museum director James Thrall Soby, and art critic Rosamund Frost, who, "interestingly, did not see him primarily as an émigré artist from Europe but drew connections between his use of color and his Latin American origins" (Eckmann 181). Matta's position in the 1940s was eloquently described by Octavio Paz in an attempt to highlight Matta's often unrecognized importance with respect to the convergence of these art movements:

> The central figure of that moment, the intersection, the connection and inspiration, was Matta. Through him, Surrealist painting penetrated an unexplored region and, simultaneously, fertilized the art of the young North Americans. To ignore or minimize his influence, as has on occasion been attempted, is, in addition to being nonsense, scandalous. Fortunately, many North American artists and critics do not suffer from such moral and aesthetic myopia (24).

Matta's work was a synthesis of many cultures. His years and literary exposure in Europe, North America, and South America all contributed to an amalgamation of ideas and experiences. Nonetheless, as a self-described "bastard" (Haim 27) and independent, he tended to rely on his own artistic vision instead of following established art movements. Yet his adherence to his Latin American roots through the development of a lexicon of imagery and colors rarely experienced in the United States earned him dismissive criticism, and indeed, at times led to the minimization and rejection of his works. Unfortunately, some artists and critics did suffer from "aesthetic myopia," including influential New York art critic Clement Greenberg, who deemed Matta's landscapes of 1939–42 too popular, describing them as "iridescent burlesque-house decorations...which are little more, really, than the comic strip of abstract art" (154). Rosamund Frost, in particular, understood Matta in a more profound sense, orienting him within the context of his Latin American origins and astutely predicting as early as 1944 that Matta "probably...[would] remain an isolated phenomenon, [the] result of the mingling of the Iberian race, French intellectualism, the American continent and the modern age" (Eckmann 181).

This subtle depreciation of Matta's work because of its Latin American aesthetic makes one wonder whether, in the art world, there is not an unconscious, persistent thread of hostility toward Latin America. Latin American art, and more specifically Matta's art, have often been validated first as that of an artist who has lived in and experienced the influences of Europe. The superimposition of art historical labels onto Latin American art denies the intrinsic value of an aesthetic already steeped in its own culture. Matta's art has continued to elude classification because none of these superimposed European and North American labels befits his endeavor. Matta himself insisted on his freedom to rebel against the tyranny of such labels, defining for himself the term "Latin American": "This antioppressive element is what I like to call 'Latinness'" (Carrasco 17). The issue of his reception should be discussed, therefore, not only in the light of his European influences but

also in the light of his Latin American origins, which are often minimized or negated. This invisible quality must be made visible, we must see as Matta would have seen the truth:

> Usando esas rara forma de inteligencia que se me aparece a mi, yo trato de abrir la palabra y decir por ejemplo en este caso: "verdad" es "ver" y "dar," o "dad." Ves tú? Pero lo importante es **qué** se da. El problema para mí está en lo siguiente: **cómo ves cuando ves** (Carrasco 12).
>
> Using this rare form of intelligence that appears to me, I try to open the word and say in this case for example: "truth" is "to see" and "to give" or "give." Do you see? But the important thing is what is given. The problem for me is in the following: **how do you see when you see.**

While attempts to draw a direct correlation between a particular writer and particular artistic works could only be speculative, an understanding of the Latin American literary tradition and its explicit role in Matta's intellectual life and artistic vision may provide interesting insights into the evolution of his art. Consequently, the appreciation of Matta's work would be strengthened by an exploration of the biographical influences within his development.

Chile, Father Earth

Matta was born in Santiago, Chile to a family of Basque origins in 1912. True to his self-identification as a poet, he used poetic license to change his date of birth to 11/11/11. While Matta's Surrealistic adherences supported such an invention, it is quite possible, as suggested by Paul Haim, that there were also emotional reasons for the selection of that particular date.[1] Scant adult attention was paid to children in Matta's home and, as a child, he had very little interaction with his parents (Haim 22). His was a sensorial upbringing infused, on the one hand, with nature and life on his father's ranches, and, on the other hand, with the richness of literature and art introduced to him by his European-educated mother. Of his memories of nature in Latin America, Matta offered the following:

> It's that all the forests that we know nowadays are zoos or botanical gardens; they are like pet dogs, pet forests. But I want to tell you that when I lived in Latin America I was afraid of nature. For example, when I stretched out on the ground, on a hill, at night after a walk, I knew that things could happen: rare insects that bite you, snakes and loads of bugs (Carrasco 14).

Regarding his father Matta recalled:

> My father didn't read anything, he was a gentleman, an always absent gentleman, horse lover, thinly mustached, very elegant. He was a type of "clubman," indifferent, who made me think of Adolphe Menjou [...]. Indifferent, was what he was, especially with respect to his children. I felt like a bastard. That "bastardism" pushed me to distinguish myself from the rest (Haim 22).

Certainly, Matta associated his father with the natural world as well as with his own sense of himself as an outsider. While much remains ambiguous in the artist's relationship with his father, Matta's affinity for the outdoors, for the fantastic beauty and earthiness of its landscapes, was prevalent in his early work. Perhaps his connection with the American landscape and with the natural imagery he encountered on trips to Mexico re-awakened his connection with Chile's landscape, and by extension, with his father, inspiring such masterpieces as *The Year 1944—the Putting to Death of the Father* and *The Earth is a Man*, both from 1942.

Matta's mother, nonetheless, represented the opposite: culture, refinement, literature, and art. Educated in schools throughout Europe, she traveled and read extensively. She left Europe for Chile in order to marry. Matta described his memories of his mother in terms of her love for literature. Similarly, Matta developed those same interests at an early age. In the back of the garden of their home in Santiago, Matta's parents had constructed a children's playhouse which boasted a small stage where Matta and his siblings spent evenings presenting plays for their parents and their friends. As if foreshadowing his future pursuits, the young Matta was responsible for the texts and the decorations (Haim 22).

To this strange combination of literary refinement and untamed nature, add the family's link to the Basque community, and one begins to see the quality of Matta's young life in Chile. The Basques were a small, privileged group who identified very clearly with their tradition of isolation—an isolation that resulted in their own marginalization. While recognizing the inherent difficulties of belonging to a minority, Matta credited his artistic and psychological independence to these peoples. "We were Basques. Our friends were

too. This awakened in me a feeling of independence, a form of natural pride...I feel solely tied to an oral tradition, in fact my painting has its roots in the oral tradition since, in no way, does it refer to the history of painting" (Haim 23).

Matta's formal education, too, was reflective of a certain marginalization in Chilean society. He was educated by Jesuits in grammar and high schools at the Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y de María. He recalled that "when [he] was an adolescent [he] was Chilean and of that [he had] no doubt, but at that time some Chileans considered [him] a little foreign...because [he] was educated in the French way" (Carrasco 233). French, not Spanish, was spoken, and the students were punished for speaking Spanish. The priests were all French, Belgian, and Irish; Chilean history was substituted for French history. Somewhat ruefully, Matta acknowledged that he was an extremely obedient child, both at home and at school. Not until later, while studying architecture under the Jesuits at the Universidad Católica en Chile, did Matta begin to raise questions about the invisible realm, thereby initiating his lifelong quest for visual analogies of the unseen. In 1932 Matta walked away with prizes for his scandalous presentation of his graduation project, entitled "League of Religions." He had conceived of a group of buildings based on sketches of women in suggestive poses, whose bodies corresponded to concrete functions of the building; it was "the first example of his approach to space as biomorphic and fantasist, rather than geometric, realistic and rational" (Fletcher 233). By 1933 Matta felt obliged to leave; "true life couldn't be found there" (Haim 27; Carrasco 20). "It was as if I were not [in Santiago]...because I felt empty...it was as if, in the middle of a great dinner or banquet full of people dining, there were an empty bottle. They don't realize, no one touches it, no one uses it. It is there and things happen all around it" (Carrasco 39).

I Have Climbed Your Mountains to Light Up Screams

Although the precise date of his departure from Chile is unknown, it is certain that, in the mid-1930s, Matta embarked on a journey that changed his life.[2] He crossed the Atlantic and surfaced in Europe. Over the next two years, Matta work in Paris with the famed rationalist architect Le Corbusier.[3] His family, however, was in Spain. Matta's aunt, Bebe Vicuña, and uncle, Carlos Morla Lynch (who was also the Chilean ambassador), lived in Madrid, a city that had developed into an intellectual bastion for the literary elite. Among the leaders there was veteran poet Juan Ramón Jiménez and among the younger generation, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, Rafael Alberti, and Federico García Lorca. It was at his aunt's house, in December 1935, that Matta first met Lorca, who used to visit the home on a daily basis. Matta's encounter with this vivacious personality broke open his world which was then comprised of reading, studying, and working on architectural projects. When he came face to face with Federico and his *joie de vivre*, Matta was shocked to discover that such a vital personality existed. Matta stated: "I had no idea that poets existed. Federico was a fun fellow, much more fun than anybody that I had met in my life" (Carrasco 50–1). Lorca was "a live" poet and dramatist who laughed, spoke nonsense, sang, and played the piano brilliantly. After Lorca gave him one of his books, *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, 1934 (his great elegy to a friend who lost his life in a bullfight), Matta confessed that he had begun to see the world in a different way (Carrasco 50). His intellectual life would henceforth inform his artistic vision.[4]

Lorca was not the only poetic influence in Matta's life. Two other Latin American poets had a tremendous impact on Matta's decision to reject architecture and its wholly orderly forms in favor of the more emotive arts of literary and artistic poetry. Coincidentally (or not) both poets were Chileans. The first was Pablo Neruda, whom Matta met in 1936 at his aunt's home. Matta was already familiar with Neruda's early works from Chile, *Crepusculario* (1923) and the wildly popular *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción deseperada* (1924). Matta recalled that due to their difference in age and professional stature, Neruda never took him seriously, always referring to him as "the nephew" (Carrasco 71). Feeling every bit the neophyte in the face of Neruda's legendary status, Matta began to read Neruda's more recent works paying closer attention. Perhaps even more influential on Matta's emerging artistic style was Neruda's poem *Residencia en la tierra* (1932), published to great acclaim in Madrid in its expanded form in 1935. Neruda's rich imagery, expressing loneliness and survival in an alien land, came from his dark experiences in the Orient, where he had served first as Consul of Chile in Rangoon and then in Ceylon. Expressed in terms of chaos and oppression, the

driving ideas behind this literary imagery bore natural parallels to the Surrealist movement, which repudiated order and reason as a reaction to the horrors of World War I.

> Almost without my reason, with my fingers,
> with slow waters slowly flooded
>
> I fall into the shadows, in the middle
> of broken-down objects,
> and I stare at spiders, and graze forests
> of unfinished secret wood,
> and pass between damp uprooted fibers
> into the living core of substance and silence
>
> It is I with laments without origin
> unnourished, wakeful, alone,
> entering darkening corridors,
> arriving at your mysterious matter (Neruda in Durán and Safir 18).

The unabashed eroticism of the poem cannot be denied, but what grounds it in an earthy sensuality is Neruda's use of organic, primordial imagery. Similar visual metaphors are clearly identifiable in Matta's early drawings from the late 1930s, such as *Horoscope*, 1937, *Untitled*, 1937, and *Untitled*, 1938 (nos. 1, 2, and 5). Biomorphic, swirling forms layered upon each other evoke Neruda's references to matter, uprooted fibers, and cores of substance. Matta's and Neruda's imagery, as well as their lives, remained intertwined over the next several years and, indeed, decades.

A few months after meeting Lorca, Matta met the renowned Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral. In August 1936, Mistral invited Matta to visit her in Portugal, where he spent three months with her. Matta acknowledged that the poet awakened him intellectually, much sooner than had the Surrealists (Carrasco 69). Expressed in mystical undertones, Mistral's poetry reflected her deep concern for the indigenous. This element is not surprising given that she counted among her favorite literary influences the Bible, Dante, popular legends and literatures; among the great Spanish influences, she noted her devotion to the great mystics of the Golden Age: Saint Teresa de Jesús, Fray Luis de Granada, and above all Saint John of the Cross (Calderón 17). A Chilean poet and schoolteacher, Mistral possessed an enormous revolutionary spirit, attributable in part to her ties to Mexico and the Revolution. In July 1922, immediately following the Mexican revolution, Mistral arrived in Mexico having been invited by José Vasconcelos, the philosopher, politician, and educator. As Minister of Public Education, Vasconcelos introduced Mistral to his cultural brigades, which proposed to link intellectuals and school teachers in a cultural revolutionary front (*Canto a México* 11). This profound Mexican experience inspired Mistral's two classic books of poetry, *Desolación* (1922) and *Tala* (1938). It was in Portugal, during the long days when Mistral would dictate her poems from *Tala* (1938) to her secretary, that Matta fell under the spell of this extraordinary woman (Carrasco 68–9). Expressing narrative themes of death (*Historias de loca*), nature (*Todas íbamos a ser reinas*), and the Indoamerican (*Dos himnos*), *Tala* is Mistral's self-proclaimed favorite work of art and the one with which she most clearly identified. In addition, she introduced Matta to the writings of José Martí, the great Cuban liberator and antimperialist poet and activist. Matta was struck by Mistral's pure, patriotic spirit with respect to Latin America—all of Latin America—and her revolutionary desire to educate and protect its exploited populations. Since, at that time, Matta was becoming interested in poetics and politics, the themes she was developing resonated deeply within him. Mistral sent this promising talent to London to meet Agustín Edwards, who was then the Chilean ambassador to the Court of St. James. While there, Matta visited with Bauhaus teachers Walter Gropius and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, the Surrealist painter René Magritte, the sculptor Henry Moore, and the English Surrealist Roland Penrose (Ferrari 199).

From London, Matta returned to Paris, to his job with Le Corbusier, and to anticipated employment at the upcoming International Exhibition of 1937 in the Spanish pavilion. There, Matta came into direct contact with Picasso's masterpiece, *Guernica* (1937). This work would later serve as inspiration and support for the more political direction he took in his work.

Meanwhile, the Spanish Civil War was becoming increasingly polarized and Matta learned, during his worldwide travels in 1936, of Lorca's untimely death some months before. Lorca's *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (1934) had become a foreshadowing of his own death. In August

1936, knowing that his ties to the liberal intellectual milieu made him suspect to the right-wing movement, Lorca fled Madrid to seek refuge in his hometown of Granada. It was there that he was captured, driven out to his beloved countryside, shot, and buried in an unmarked grave. Matta's reaction to Lorca's violent death was to write a film script on New Year's Eve in Stockholm. He wrote it in the form of a poem entitled, "La Terre est un Homme," 'The Earth is a Man,' which would later become the title for Matta's brilliant and, arguably, quintessential masterpiece. Interestingly, Matta's initial emotional reaction to this horrifying experience was not through painting, but instead through poetry. In excerpts from "La Terre est un Homme," the descriptions of life and death in a chaotic world are treated with visual poetic imagery clearly reminiscent of Lorca, who was now being eulogized by his friend's own lament.

Scene 28:
In my story there is a vanquished
paleness, unleashed fears putting out
fires with their wings.
Without me, there is dust on the grounds
I have trodden upon and rains that have
fallen avoiding me.
I am an objection to light, an outcome
with ends stopped in their tracks.

Scene 77:
In the parts of the outstretched body, articles of death.
There are hands of smoke in instruments, the voices of silence continue.
It is a body's thirst for earth, it is an earth's thirst for body.
Stretched autumns on which hanging shadows rain.
Flames dying out in the fire.
—I have climbed your mountains to light up screams.

Scene 111:
The sun is already an object covered with [cheap metal and] green rags.
It is a sunset on the horizon, scaring off clouds and rocking hours.
It is the first afternoon of death.

Scene 143:
The earth is full of water. Volcanoes and bull-fights are missing
(qtd. in Ferrari 212).

The remarkable imagery evoked in this poem became the literary basis for Matta's paintings throughout the decades that followed. Matta's artistic vision was still evolving and, like Lorca, who only turned to writing after the death of his musical mentor, Matta took his first serious steps into the art world only after his friend's death. Indeed, Lorca's death provided the impetus to visit Salvador Dalí, and it was in mid-1937 that Matta presented Dalí with Lorca's letter of introduction. Dalí in turn introduced Matta and his drawings to the leader of the Surrealist movement, André Breton. Exactly when in 1937 Matta wholly rejected architecture for painting is unclear, and many people, among them Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró, were credited with effecting this change. What *is* clear is that Breton was delighted with the young Chilean, whose political, social, and artistic ideas had undoubtedly been infused with intense literary influences of some of Spain's and Latin America's most brilliant poets. Surrealism differed from most art movements in that it was not only visual but also literary and political. Breton included Matta and Gordon Onslow Ford (the Englishman and grandson of the sculptor Edward Onslow Ford) in the Surrealist group because "he perceived that they could make a new and original contribution rather than because they conformed to existing Surrealist practices" (Sawin 32).

The Surrealist Circle

In January 1938, Matta contributed four drawings to the largest Surrealist exhibition in Paris, at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts; 1938 was an intense and productive year for Matta, at which point he began his series of "inscapes" and "psychological morphologies."[5] These series were metaphors for a new kind of "inner landscape," providing visual imagery for the internal evocations of the artistic psyche. The summer of 1938 found Gordon Onslow Ford and Matta at Trevignon near the Finistere coast of Brittany. They immersed themselves in readings and lively discussions of the psychic phenomena described in P. D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* (Sawin 28). According to Onslow Ford, he and Matta "wanted to extend the

fields of consciousness beyond sensory perception" (Sawin 38–9). Matta's attempts to visually depict time and change were propelled further upon seeing Marcel Duchamp's works, especially *The Passage from The Virgin to the Bride,* which he perceived correctly as representing not only movement but change (Miller 11). Never straying far from poetry, his first mode of expression, Matta continued his exploration of the psyche in prose, contributing to the magazine *Minotaure*, number 11, with an article entitled "Mathématique sensible–Architecture du temps." Not bound by any formal constraints, these spontaneous literary images provided a stream of consciousness reflective of the Surrealist affirmation of the irrational, a tapping of their unconscious creativity known as automatism.

> A way must be discovered of passing between the rages that move in tender parallels, thick, soft angles or beneath the furry undulations through which frights remain contained. Man misses the obscure thrusts of his beginnings, that enveloped him in moist walls, where the blood beat right next to the eye with the sound of the mother (Ferrari 208).

In what turned out to be the last issue of *Minotaure*, Breton briefly introduced Matta and his newest protégées to the Surrealist circle, describing their having opted for automatism, "their innovations in this area, and their profound yearning to transcend the three-dimensional universe" (Sawin 56).

As the political turmoil of 1939 began to affect the Surrealist group, Matta and others spent a last idyllic summer in Europe at a chateau rented by Onslow Ford in Chemillieu, in the Ain near the Swiss border. Matta, his American wife and fellow painter Anne Matta-Clark, Onslow Ford, Esteban Frances, (a young Spanish painter who had left Spain after Franco's victory), and Yves Tanguy traveled to Chemillieu and were later joined by others. In the fall of 1939, Matta returned to Paris and lived briefly with Pablo Neruda at la Roche-Guyon until Duchamp insisted that he and Tanguy exile to New York (Haim 90). Matta complied and left in October insisting that "[he] had signed too many anti-Hitler and anti-Stalin papers not to be persecuted by the SS. The 'resistance' was not yet possible" (Eckmann 176).

The Earth is a Man

Matta's arrival in New York in October of 1939 marked the beginning of a prolific period during which he produced many striking canvases. Matta's unique experience among the group of émigré artists in New York City helped to shape his work. He was much less of a legend than many of his fellow artists who had already fully established themselves in Europe, and were known as the first official generation of Surrealists, among them Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dali. The youngest of the exile artists, at twenty-seven, Matta was just beginning his career. His youth and vitality contributed to the positive reception of his work by young American artists. Furthermore, the contemporary American artists gravitated toward him because he was the only émigré who spoke English. Although Matta's work was more revolutionary and poetic in tone than many of his Surrealist counterparts, Breton, Tanguy, and Duchamp continued to champion his vision. In 1940, he remained focused on his inner world but also found inspiration in the American landscape. Matta attributed the terrible yet beautiful forces of nature depicted in many of his early American paintings like *Rain* (1940–41), *Rocks* (1940), and *Invasion of the Night* (1941) to his encounter with the American landscape: "When I arrived in the United States I started talking about the earth. In these pictures I tried to show not landscape which is 'scenery'—a scene of the earth—but the earth as something terrific, burning, changing, transforming, flowing" (Eckmann 178).

That same year, Matta's paintings were exhibited in his first, small one-man show at the Julien Levy Gallery. Predicated on automatism, Matta's art immediately attracted the New York School artists. Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, and William Baziotes similarly experimented with automatism, both in verse and in painting (Sawin 167). Ultimately, however, Matta's closest friendship was with Motherwell. Motherwell had always taken a keen interest in Europe and had been affected by André Malraux's discourse on the Spanish Civil War. According to Haim, Motherwell's love of Spain grew after befriending Matta, inspiring him to create his *Elegies* dedicated to the Spanish Civil War (90). Coming full circle, one of Motherwell's most austere works, *At five in the afternoon,* was inspired by Lorca's great elegy to Ignacio Sánchez Mejías.

Motherwell and Matta shared an interest not only in Spain but in Mexico as well. The extent to which Mexico influenced Matta and his art has not been given due recognition. Indeed, his work of the 1940s is almost exclu-

sively considered in light of the time he spent in North America with the Surrealists in New York and the effect he had on the nascent Abstract Expressionist movement. A member of the emerging Abstract Expressionism movement, Motherwell had already spent two years under the tutelage of David Alfaro Siqueiros, the Mexican muralist painter and, according to Matta, was painting with hints of muralism (Haim 90).[6]

In the summer of 1941, Motherwell asked Matta and his wife, Anne, to join him in Mexico. This trip was pivotal for Matta on many levels. Already acquainted with the American terrain, Mexico's landscape offered unfamiliar visual images, possibly reminiscent of those he had experienced as a child in Chile. Evocative of the Latin American imagery he had encountered first in Neruda's poetry, where eroticism and nature mixed indiscriminately and later in Mistral's poetry in her paean to the Latin American land, the Mexican landscape left a powerful impression on Matta. Mexico's volcanic topography, in particular, captured Matta's imagination. He saw the pulsating, volatile earth as analogous to the inner world to which he was lending form in his inscapes. According to Elizabeth A. T. Smith and Colette Dartnall, after Matta's return to New York, "the powerful impact of landscape resonated with him and volcanic imagery began to appear in his work, indicating cataclysmic emotions and ideas pouring from his inner self" (16). This imagery began to appear in his works, beginning with the drawing *Woman playing ball in front of the volcano*, (1940 no. 9), and culminating in the masterpiece *The Earth is a Man* (1942). Sawin describes this brilliant painting in terms of its effect on the viewer:

> His technique of sponging on and wiping off thinned pigment to produce translucent layers of color effectively conveyed the convulsions that dissolve the boundaries between earth and sky, as the atmosphere reddens with glowing volcanic matter and the earth becomes yellow-white with heat. The space seems to engulf the viewer as the eye is pulled in multiple directions over the canvas surface (209).

Magnificent paintings and drawings from this period were exhibited in a solo show in 1942 at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. Throughout Matta's life, he had enjoyed deconstructing and reconstructing the titles of his works in Spanish, bilingual and trilingual in form, paying homage to his poetic proclivities. A number of drawings executed between 1941 and 1943 reflect this tendency, and five out of the seven drawings in the Pierre Matisse exhibit had Spanish titles, indicating a fundamental association with the Spanish language and culture (Fletcher 253, note 28).

Narrative Influences and Their Effect: The Rupture

The unusually large format of Matta's paintings, combined with more sociopolitical messages, signaled the increasing influence of the Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco (Eckmann 179). Of his four months in Taxco, Mexico in 1941, Matta wrote: "I found in Mexico a class violence. The silence between foreigner, Spaniard, and Indian was a frightening silence of drawn knives. My painting, *Years of Fear*, is about the interior battlefield" (Sawin 250). Turning away from an exclusively internal world, Matta began to develop in his paintings the latent poetic imagery of Neruda and Mistral reminiscent of his South American roots and influences. Indeed, Neruda's visual lexicon in his great epic poem on the natural and collective history of Latin America, *Canto General*, had a direct influence on Matta's paintings. Matta recounted that when Neruda was writing his poem he asked that Matta read it:

> The truth is that I read that work very seriously and you can even say that there are some paintings that have something to do with it. For example I painted a piece that is called: "All the Syllables of Spring" and another that's called "In Order to Cover the Earth with a New Dew"; they are always my translations but you could say that they are identified with the spirit of *Canto General* (Carrasco 78).

Neruda had been named general consul to Mexico in 1940 and was writing his historic poem on the spirit and the emancipation of the Americas. Latinamericanist Roberto González Echeverría makes the correlation between this literary masterpiece and painting:

> The closest modern parallel to the *Canto General* in the Hispanic world is in painting, particularly in Mexican muralism and Picasso's *Guernica*.... One has the sense of being in a crowd when viewing Rivera's great murals. The self is dwarfed by the size and by the transcendence of the historical figures; one is properly reduced to being a member of the mass of spectators or victims (they are sometimes both). The same is true of Neruda's poem (qtd. in Neruda 41).

Neruda's depiction of the spirit, passing through betrayal and ultimately arriving at transcendence, both in the individual and en masse, provided a mystical yet political quality that began to appear in Matta's paintings. If, as Echeverría asserts, betrayal is the foundational story to the *Canto General* and indeed Neruda's own history, Matta could have drawn inspiration from his countryman's message in his own determination to remain faithful to his vision of art, despite possible alienation from the Surrealist group.

Nonetheless, a dialogue was being established among Matta, the Latin American poets, and the Mexican muralists, each one finding inspiration in the work of the other. The Latin American narrative influences proved a strong support for Matta, perhaps even stronger than the influences that were propelling the European Surrealists and the New York School. Matta found himself further drawn toward more narrative content that was often manifested by reintroducing the figure into his compositions. Additionally, Matta's familiarity with Picasso's *Guernica* and its explicitly political message must have provided support for his vision. Matta began to develop a new iconography in response to the oppressive reality of the political crisis of World War II: "I was attempting to use a social morphology, not a personal psycho-morphology: to move away from the intimate, imaginary forms...towards the cultural, totemic expressions of civilizations...the formation of cultures in confrontation with social landscapes" (Ferrari 229).

Although it could be argued that the representational figure was never absent from his drawings, the overt introduction of the figure into Matta's paintings proved to be a lightening rod for disputes among the Surrealists. This transition away from a personal morphology and toward a more social orientation is exemplified by his works from 1945. The female figure found in *La Femme Affamée*, (1945, no. 15) is a harsh, devouring, form representative of the personal chaos Matta was experiencing during that period.[7] *The Remainer* 1945, *A Grave Situation*, 1946, and the later *Study for However*, 1947 (nos. 16, 19, and 20) all contain totemic figures; menacing, and robotic, they appear even science-fictional in form. Matta's friendships with other young artists and scientists eager to explore revolutionary ideas of the post-war era blossomed, and Matta found himself at odds with the direction in which the Surrealists were moving.

1947 marked Matta's return to Mexico, where he visited Onslow Ford and reconnected with this mystical, magical land. The evocations of mystical elements in Matta's work drove a deeper wedge between himself and the Surrealists, sparking a clash between the impulse to retrieve mythological forms and the modern search for symbolic imagery. Ironically, that same year a sea change in the New York school occurred with Pollock's allover composition (Rubin 36). While the Abstract Expressionists were moving toward a more personal, abstract definition of their art, Matta was moving in the opposite direction, toward an aesthetic consistent with the Latin American sensibility of a more public, figurative definition; the trajectories of their new definitions revealed mutually disparate goals. The New York art critic and curator William Rubin argued that, indeed, these goals were never consonant:

> In fact, [Matta's art] had always been opposed in its goals. Matta's greater literalness and specificity, combined with his new, more readable narrative content—carried primarily by the anthropomorphic personages—were perfectly consistent outgrowths of his own earlier development (36).

Matta's growing alienation from the Surrealists did not deter him from contributing to the "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme" at Galerie Maeght in 1947, but, ultimately, upon his return to New York in 1948, he was expelled from the Surrealist movement.[8] Despite his European and Latin American ties, the professional and personal rupture with the Surrealist movement was devastating. Excluded from many prominent galleries in New York, Matta returned to Paris, by way of Chile, where he sojourned for several weeks. In Chile, he wrote for a Santiago journal insisting on the role of the artist as a revolutionary, "to discover new, affective relationships between men" (Smith and Dartnall 28). Matta would need to discover these new affective relationships upon arriving in Paris, where he was as unwelcome as in New York. Eventually settling in Rome in 1948, Matta began a new phase of creativity, turning inward toward his Latin American roots and to his burgeoning revolutionary spirit.

'Inca Matta': New Affective Relationships Between Men

The 1950s brought to Matta a new opportunity to explore his vision without the constraints of dogmatic boundaries. Matta returned to Chile in 1954 for an

exhibit at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago, and was heralded as the country's most important artist. Uninterested in being labeled a Chilean artist, he hoped to establish "a center for contemporary art intended to serve as a bridge" between Chile and the rest of the world (Fletcher 249). Before returning to Rome, Matta traveled to Peru to visit Machu Picchu. This historical center of indigenous culture and civilization was also the source of Neruda's great section of the *Canto General* entitled "The Heights of Machu Picchu." It is essentially a poem of conversion, a transcendence of betrayal. The poem offered a vision of transformation for Matta.

XII

Rise up to be born with me, my brother.

Give me your hand from the deep
zone of your disseminated sorrow.
You'll not return from the bottom of the rocks.
You'll not return from subterranean time.
Your stiff voice will not return.
Your drilled eyes will not return.
Behold me from the depths of the earth,
Laborer, weaver, silent herdsman:...

Bring to the cup of this new life, brothers,
All your timeless buried sorrows.
Show me your blood and your furrow,
Tell me: I was punished here because the jewel did not shine or the earth
Did not surrender the gemstone or kernel on time:
Show me the stone on which you fell
And the wood on which you were crucified...

Give me silence, water, hope.

Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes.

Cling to my body like magnets.

Hasten to my veins and to my mouth.

Speak through my words and my blood (Neruda 41).

Speaking about his experience in Machu Picchu on a return trip to Santiago in January 1961, Matta expressed his own desire for transformation, professing his admiration for the pre-Columbian artist:

> As a painter I feel myself to be a pre-Columbian artist [someone proposed that he should therefore call himself Tupac Matta and he said that he would prefer Inca Matta]. Those men gave a true and enthusiastic interpretation, telluric and strong, or our America. We ought to paint like them, but replacing their elements by chemical, physics and social symbols that profoundly form our world (Fletcher 249).

Returning to Rome until 1955 and, from then on, dividing his residency between there and Paris, Matta set out to change the world. With this newfound independence, he was freed to emphasize in his work narrative themes of love, interpersonal relationships, and the political order. In 1959, the Surrealists again sought his affiliation with their group, but the movement had run its course and Matta remained independent. Some of his most successful and striking compositions, produced in the 1950s, incorporated the representational figure in a geometric and planar space. Such works as *Threshold of Love*, (1955), *La Demonstration*, 1957, and *D'Amour Chargée*, 1958 (nos. 29, 31, and 34) exhibit Matta's attempt to portray invisible thoughts and feelings as visual images. *The Unthinkable* (1957, no. 33) shows a figure on the right-hand side of the canvas emitting thoughts that are struggling to escape from behind four disjointed walls. The interior thought, portrayed by a spinning, mechanical device, suggests constant movement, while the tension evoked leaves the viewer wondering if the thought can indeed be contained.[9]

In the early 1960s, Matta began a period of increased travel, which extended over the next two decades. Committing himself to the issues of Latin America, he saw there the seeds of a renaissance struggling to develop. For him Latin America held the true spirit of humor and poetry, particularly within the African and European traditions practiced in Latin America. Viewing Africa and Europe as themselves too weary for inspiration, Matta turned his attention to those same cultures found within Latin America in order to promote a new dynamic of human relations. In this "African-Latin" lexicon, he saw the embryo of a civilization analogous to those of the early Mediterranean region (Carrasco 121). He then began to promote his ideas through discussions in Latin America, especially Cuba.

The 1960s witnessed Matta's involvement in Cuba and in Castro's revolution, beginning with his visit in 1963 and culminating in his participation in 1968 in the Congreso Cultural in Havana. There he collaborated with students on the painting entitled *So that liberty not become like a statue.* At the conference, Matta presented a lecture entitled "The interior guerilla war," expounding on his idea of the fundamental aspects of a true revolution. However, not everyone supported his enthusiasm for revolutions, especially in Cuba. His close friend Octavio Paz explained Matta's views within the context of the last century:

> Surrealism was a strong hot wind of rebellion blowing across this icy and cruel century. [Matta] has remained faithful to that subversive and generous impulse. With one of the characteristic expressions that reveal his enormous verbal gifts, Matta has said that he paints "so that liberty not become like a statue." A fine maxim. Unfortunately, like other artists of our time- and not minor artists, but Picasso and Pound and Neruda and Eluard—he at times confused the statues in power with the living revolutionaries in prisons or in exile, mistook tyrants for liberators. This is not a complaint: I have it to state my disagreement (25).

Much later, Matta spoke to the philosopher Eduardo Carrasco about his idea of the "interior guerilla war":

> Well, I am supporting all this but always within a certain percentage. Never unconditionally, because I see that these processes also, in certain instances, do not see.... Suddenly, they begin to use the instruments that were used in the past; for example, that all men are equal. But it is also true that not all men are equal and this suddenly causes the moment to arrive in which the expressed truth is broken (16).

Matta's most personal political involvement was with his native country, Chile. Salvador Allende was gathering support among the people for his socialist ideas and received Matta's explicit endorsement for his candidacy. Matta's works were exhibited in Chile in 1969, 1970, and 1972. Elected president in 1970, Allende personally invited Matta to become the cultural attaché of Chile, at which point Matta began two projects. The first, begun in 1971–72, sought to realize Allende's original idea of creating an International Conference of Culture in Chile (Carrasco 77). This project was never completed, of course, due to Pinochet's coup d'etat, Allende's death, and the subsequent military dictatorship. The second project summoned all the "African-Latin" artists of America as well as foreigners to contribute works in an attempt to promote African-Latin culture and artistic themes. After much delay, this latter project was eventually completed and resulted in a museum bearing Salvador Allende's name. To date, this museum in Santiago has acquired over 400 works from artists all over the world—a token of their solidarity. During Pinochet's regime, however, Matta left Chile personally devastated: "I left here because I was nothing" (Carrasco 245). The compositions of this period show a return to large canvases; they are characterized by more rounded forms which seem to float and whirl through space, evoking vast internal and external change and transformation (see *Upheaval of One's Ocean*, 1972, *L'eclat d'exiles*, 1974, and *Rooming Life*, 1977; nos. 45, 46, and 48). "The poets," said Matta "with what should be their continuous incitements, are a guarantee for revolutions" (Haim 121).

Verb America

Matta returned to his literary world, participating in the 1982 Inter-American Conference called "Cultural Autonomy of Our Americas" in Nicaragua. There, together with Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, he explored Latin American cultural themes. In order to explain the Latin American literary aesthetic, scholars have often applied the themes of magic and realism to Márquez's work. Similarly, Cortázar's writing has been described in terms of its labyrinthine quality. Both Márquez's magical realism and Cortázar's labyrinthine literary structure naturally find parallels in Matta's art, which can be viewed as a visual extension of the Latin American literary approach. The renaissance of writing in Latin America in the last half of the twentieth century was not an isolated occurrence. Recognizing the breadth of the phenomenon, Matta stated:

> I think that in Latin America there is something occurring on a continental level and not just a local level. The fact that Zalamea appears in Colombia and later Garcia Márquez and that there is Guillén in Cuba and Octavio Paz in Mexico, all these things are in the end the same (Carrasco 88).

Narrative themes expressed symbolically with a new pictorial iconography began to surface in Matta's work. This iconography was consistent with the Latin American literary renaissance in that it employed the same aesthetic: a desire to connect with the mystical. *Art Cadia* and *The Sign*, both from 1982 (nos. 49 and 51), reveal a softening of forms and colors, combined with figurative imagery suggesting timeless, mythological reflection. In 1983 Matta addressed the correlation between the Mediterranean and this Latin American renaissance in a series of paintings and poetry all entitled, *El Mediterráneo y el verbo América*. Matta expressed America as a verb, both poetically and visually, emphasizing its constant evolution as opposed to an exclusively stationary, unchanging identity (29).

Latin America was not the only place that celebrated Matta's art and its connection to literature. Spain, which had recognized in Matta an adopted son, hosted large-scale retrospectives in Valencia and Barcelona in 1983, and then again at the Reina Sofía in Madrid in 1999. One of the greatest Spanish classics, Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, provided unending delight and fodder for Matta in his 1983 series of large-scale drawings of the same title (nos. 52 and 53). Matta's enjoyment of this classic stemmed from his identity with humanity and his lifelong quest to make the invisible visible. Matta saw the autobiographical trials of Cervantes—a common man with common problems—intertwined with the adventures of Don Quixote, as well as perhaps with his own personal journey. In relating an anecdote about the Spanish attitude towards life, Matta pointed out:

> ...this attitude certainly represents the essential quality of living poetry that lies deep within the Spanish people: an attitude in which the real is not subservient to the imaginary, nor the imaginary to the real, but where real life and the life of the imagination co-exist, being not only similar but, to some extent, interchangeable. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are really one, and Cervantes only succeeded in dividing this single personality by the use of extreme exaggeration, caricaturing the two aspects (Ferrari 205).

Rafael Alberti, the Spanish poet and one of Matta's oldest friends, wrote that Matta was a painter with true literary talent, "who always looks for the way to give an unexpected twist to things" (35). Reflecting his simultaneous acceptance of both Spanish and Latin American influences, Matta never saw the visual and the verbal as dichotomous. One of Matta's greatest contributions, both in a literary and an artistic sense, was the way in which he used narratives to redefine our concepts of reality and art. Ultimately, Matta sought to make a difference in people's lives, challenging them and provoking them to look beyond images, words, and boundaries. Like Don Quixote, Matta wielded his lance, ready to pierce our consciousness, to ask the questions of the invisible, to put an image to what no one else sees. In the end, this Don Quixote trudges forth, a solitary figure, sometimes in error but always true to his vision.

I am grateful to Nancy Netzer and Naomi Blumberg for their support and helpful suggestions in the writing of this essay. My sincere appreciation to Thomas Monahan for kindly sharing with me his conversations with Matta.

Notes

1 Paul Haim, author of *Matta: Agitar el ojo antes de mirar*, relates that Matta customarily spent the Chilean summer months of October, November, and December, with his maternal grandfather in Paris. These visits coincided each year with Matta's birthday. This same grandfather, prone to giving lavish gifts, informed Matta that, rather than buy him a gift, he had instead prepared a birthday surprise for him. In later years Matta realized that his grandfather had simply forgotten to buy him something and had decided to take him to the Champs-Elysees. He told the young Matta that he had ordered the endless parade of November 11 just for him! Recounts Matta, "All those orchestras, soldiers, horses, all for me! And I believed it! After that, how do you expect me not to become a megalomaniac? (Matta's laughs)" (Haim 22).

2 In most of the sources on Matta there is ambiguity in terms of the dates of Matta's departure from Chile, his years at Le Corbusier's office, and his subsequent travels to France and Spain. Fletcher dates his departure from Chile in 1935, pinpointing February to May as the months he spent traveling through Peru to Panama and corroborating the dates with postmarked autograph letters including his itinerary from Matta to his then-girlfriend Lillian Lorca (Fletcher 233–235, note 8). Further, she places Matta at Le Corbusier's office from late 1935 to late 1937 (233–35). Haim dates Matta's departure from Chile in 1933 with six months on a merchant marine boat landing in France, and dates Matta's residence at Le Corbusier's office from 1934–35 (Haim 27). Matta stated in his conversations with the philosopher Eduardo Carrasco that he left Chile in the beginning of 1933 (Carrasco 20). In addition, Carrasco traces Matta's months with Mistral in the latter part of 1936, when Matta claimed to still be working with Le Corbusier (72). Josefina Alix confirms from Carlos Mora's diary that Matta visited Mora in December 1935 (21, note 7). Finally, Martica Sawin places Matta as arriving in Paris in 1935 (31).

3 Matta established the years he spent with Le Corbusier as 1934–36.

4 Lorca's repudiation of strict adherence to one artistic style both in his poetry and in his drawings struck a chord in Matta. Inspired by their friendship, Matta showed some of his drawings to Lorca who in turn wrote a letter of introduction to his good friend Salvador Dalí. Matta would hold onto that letter for another two years before sending it and setting in motion the cataclysmic events that changed his life.

5 See Cernuschi "Mindscapes and Mind Games: Visualizing Thought in the Work of Matta and his Abstract Expressionist Contemporaries," (pp 48–80).

6 Even before the emergence of Abstract Expressionism, Mexico was never far from the consciousness of the Surrealists who viewed the country's exotic mixture of lush vegetation and pre-Columbian culture as fertile inspiration for their imaginations. Mexico had hosted its own Surrealist exhibit in 1940, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York had a sweeping exhibit, "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" in the same year. The focus of the latter exhibit was on Mexican artists of all kinds and from all periods, including the pre-Columbian era, colonial nineteenth- and twentieth- century art, indigenous arts and crafts, art of children, and self-taught naïve painters (Quirarte 22). For the Surrealists, Mexico held great allure, for both aesthetic and political reasons. During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), Mexico readily accepted political refugees and was well known as a destination for the intellectual elite fleeing Hitler and Stalin. Indeed, the very leader of the Surrealist movement had Mexican affiliations. Upon the birth of his daughter in 1938, André Breton, the founder of the Surrealist movement, decided to assume a post there as a cultural ambassador in the hopes of visiting Leon Trotsky, his political idol.

7 Direct conversation between Matta and Thomas Monahan; relayed to author by Thomas Monahan.

8 Matta's affair with Gorky's estranged wife, as well as Gorky's subsequent suicide, were perceived to have contributed to Matta's expulsion from the Surrealist group (Fletcher 253, note 37). Matta felt as thought he was expelled from the circle for purely emotional reasons (Haim 55 and Carrasco 112).

9 Direct conversation between Matta and Thomas Monahan; relayed to author by Thomas Monahan.

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Roberto Matta: International Provocateur

Mary Schneider Enriquez

"The case of Matta is different: not only was his influence more prolonged and profound, his person and his work are living presences in contemporary art."[1]

~~ Octavio Paz

By 1944, Chilean Roberto Matta Echaurren achieved a place known by no Latin American before him: that of leading international artist, judged without regard to his origins. Matta's technical skill as a painter, his original ideas, his engaging personality, and the relationships he fostered, led to his decisive influence among the émigré Surrealists and the fledgling Abstract Expressionists in New York; to garner praise from Marcel Duchamp, prominent curators and critics; and to earn an important place within the art of the twentieth century. Although Matta was born and formally educated in Chile, his Latin American heritage plays little visible role in the complex system of symbolism and space he expressed in his art. That is, his pieces do not incorporate the religious or cultural imagery or the realist visual language typically associated with art from Latin America. Moreover, Matta's lifelong residency outside of the region, first in the United States and then in Europe, served to maintain his decidedly international reputation. He differed from Latin Americans such as Mexican painter Diego Rivera and Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García: Although they resided and received fame abroad, they incorporated themes and iconography deliberately linked with their Latin American origins and later returned to their countries to paint. This essay will explore the nature of Matta's role as an international artist, by examining his art, his ideas, the relationships he nurtured, and the choices he made within changing societal contexts.

Beginnings

Matta was born in Santiago, Chile in 1912, into a prominent family which included a former President of Chile. Typical of the artist's penchant for self-dramatization, he later stated that his birthday was 11/11/11 (Fletcher 231). His mother was European born and highly cultured, his father was Chilean and a businessman. Matta was raised in a strict Catholic household and educated in French Jesuit Schools where the focus was more on French history and culture than on Chilean heritage (Fletcher 222–23). Matta was, in many ways, typical of the elites of Latin America: He received a superior Classical education, he was well-versed in languages and aware of current European poetry and arts, and he was encouraged to look abroad to Paris as the world's intellectual and cultural center.[2] After high school, Matta earned his architecture degree in 1932–33 at the Universidad Católica of Santiago. There he conceived the "League of Religions," an innovative project in which the building designs were based on the outlines of human bodies. Several months later, without telling his family, he took a boat to France.

Once Matta left Chile, he never really returned. Europe became his home and its influences in his early years played a decisive role in his art. Later in his life Matta stated that "...emigration comes from wanting to breathe."[3] Judging from the visual path he took not long after his arrival in France, he found there the personal and artistic freedoms he had been seeking. In Paris, in late 1935, he began an apprenticeship with Le Corbusier that lasted until 1937, during which time he met and was influenced by important Latin

American writers such as Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral. The former's poetry, specifically *Residencia en la Tierra* 1932 (expanded in 1935), which conveys the intuitive experience of exploring a world in chaos and desolation, depicts many ideas that Matta was to present in his paintings years later. The themes found in Mistral's poems, those of nature and the mysticism and passion prevalent in Latin America, were subjects Matta chose to explore through painting after meeting her in 1936 (Fletcher 235–36).

Spanish poet and dramatist Federico García Lorca was another influential acquaintance during this period. Matta was deeply affected by the Spaniard to whom he was introduced in 1934. When the controversial figure was assassinated in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War, Matta responded by writing an extraordinary film script called *The Earth is a Man*, including 162 fast-paced scenes depicting chaos and death with searing, evocative imagery (Fletcher 239). This film foretold the direction Matta was to pursue in his art. Themes of personal tragedy and the psychological trauma man faces on this earth, as well as societal breakdown and political criticism, pervade Matta's art over many decades.

Paris, Painting, and Surrealism

Matta's foray into art and away from architecture began in 1936, at the encouragement of his friend, British artist Gordon Onslow Ford, a budding Surrealist. In 1937, Matta met Salvador Dalí, who introduced him to the Surrealists' leader André Breton. He also viewed for the first time the work of Marcel Duchamp, whose visual and theoretical concerns Matta found intriguing, and later incorporated these same concerns into his wartime paintings (Smith and Dartnall 11). By late 1937, at Breton's invitation, Matta formally joined the Surrealist circle, which included Yves Tanguy, Kay Sage, and Onslow Ford. He then participated in the Paris "Exposicion International du Surrealism" of 1938 (Day 115).

In spite of those connections, it is important to note that Matta's drawings and paintings from 1937 onward, although visually similar to the imaginative Surrealism of the time, expressed the artist's own particular interests and ideas. As Matta later stated, his art sought to: "agitar el ojo antes de mirar," 'shake up the eye before seeing' (Haim 119). Some techniques he employed to 'shake the eye' included articulating the fourth dimension, capturing the microscopic views of plants, and expressing the multifaceted fusion of the worlds inside and outside of the individual. To conclusively state that Matta was a Surrealist diminishes his achievements as an original talent and leader, pigeonholing him within an artistic category. He became part of the group on the basis of shared ideas, while simultaneously not capitulating on his own visual priorities. Moreover, he strategically chose his artistic alliances; Tanguy, Duchamp, and the emerging New York School of artists among others, provided key stimulus to him, but Matta did not wholeheartedly consume and reformulate their ideas. Instead, he shared issues with them and conceived his own project, even when less than favorable criticism was his reward. Ultimately, his magnetic personality and innovative painting skills drew people to him.

In Matta's earliest works—complex, richly colorful crayon drawings—he explored the ideas of organic growth and passage in space and time. *Untitled* 1937 (no. 2) and *Untitled* 1938 (no. 5) reveal Matta's interest in the microscopic photographs of plants, as well as in the three-dimensional algebraic models constructed by the popular Mathematician Jules Henri Poincare.[4] Organic flower and mitochondrial forms emerge within the flowing lines; curves and angles fill these two drawings with vibrating space. Each work on paper conveys a striking, but hallucinatory vision that seems to repeat itself like a colorful echo, continuing ad infinitum.

When Matta began drawing he did so in an automatist manner, allowing his hand to move freely, following his immediate thoughts; he simultaneously explored the ideas of non-Euclidean space, the vision provided by microscopic plant forms, and the link between the interior and exterior worlds. Although he was embraced by Breton for, among other things, his use of the Surrealist practice of automatism, Matta employed it with little interest in the Freudian theories that were motivating Surrealist methods. Rather, he saw it as a

> ...method of reading 'live' the actual function of thinking at the same speed as the matter we are thinking 'of' to read at the speed of events, to grasp unconscious material functioning in our memory with the tools at our disposal. Automatism means the irrational and the rational are running parallel and can send sparks to each other and light the common road (Sawin 1997: 2).

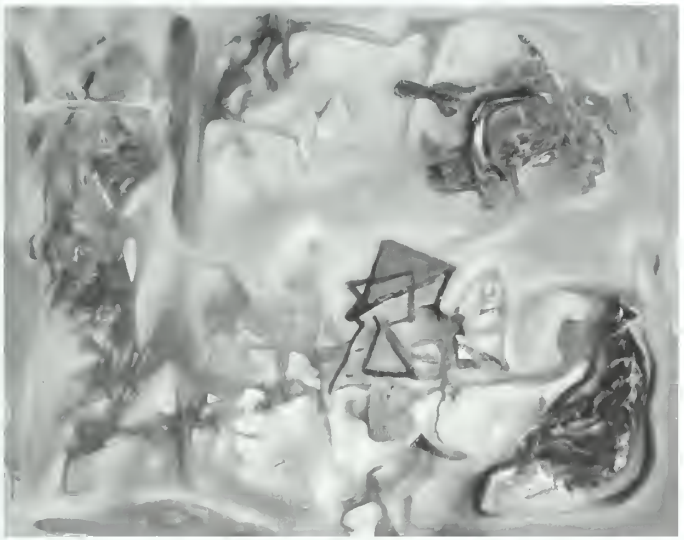

Fig. 1
Matta, *Morphology of Desire*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 36 1/4 in. Abraham and Judith Amar Foundation of Art

Critical to Matta's work from the outset was the use of spontaneous expression as a means to articulate a reality unseen—meaning the place beyond the visible where time and space merge. Upon reading Marcel Duchamp's theories in 1936, Matta for the first time conceived that art could depict time and change, or *passage*, as Duchamp called it. Matta began exploring the means by which he visualized growth and transformation, but within a shifting, expansive, non-traditional picture space (Smith and Dartnall 11).

Matta's friendship with Gordon Onslow Ford nurtured his preoccupation with depicting space beyond the third dimension through an approach that allowed a brief and immediate means of expression. In the late 1930s, the two artists began developing a grid system for conveying space and time. Both were deeply influenced by the writings of P.D. Ouspensky who believed that artists must help others see beyond the immediate and that they should help those "...confined to the prison house of sight [to] see what they do not see themselves" (Sawin 1995: 28). Ouspensky criticized the limitations of three-dimensional geometry, the inadequacy of man's visual perception, and the need for "a spatial understanding of time." These ideas—along with Poincare's mathematical theories articulated through warped planes, transparent webs of lines, and the explosion of solid objects—helped the artists counteract the effects of the single, vanishing point perspective.

During the summer of 1938, Onslow Ford and Matta shared a house in Trevignon, near the coast of Brittany and the ancestral home of the Surrealist, Yves Tanguy, whose paintings of fluid space most influenced Matta. During those months Matta not only discussed Ouspensky with Onslow Ford, but he also later produced his first painting *Crucifixion* 1938—a turbulent and wholly abstract canvas demonstrating not only the expansive space he sought to articulate, but conveying as well the beginnings of a key concept in his paintings: the "psychological morphology." Although it depicts Mary and Jesus, this mostly black picture is marked by veils, dabs, and fluid lines of luminescent white. Bursts of red marked with glaring yellow appear on an abstract field of dark versus light, suspended, illegible forms, expansive depth, and a crackling surface create tension. According to Onslow Ford, the painting, which began through 'automatic' motion, exemplified Matta's idea that "reality can only be represented in a state of perpetual transformation" (Ferrari 23–25). The immediacy of expression evident in this and later paintings by Matta was a point of note by art critics and curators. One writer described Matta's technique as "...spontaneous to the point of being careless..." (Thrall Soby 103).

Within his search for space on the two-dimensional surface, Matta began a series of paintings entitled *psychological morphology* which imparted a reality born of the fusion of the individual's inner and outer worlds. The concept was to blend the life within the mind with the life outside of it, thus exposing an "inscape," a reality never before seen. Matta described it as a way of "inventing visual equivalences for various states of consciousness" (Ferrari 720). Here he combined the themes of birth, death, conception, and growth, as well as the microscopic and the monumental, the organic, and the cosmic. Even when Matta's art lacks obvious visual references, his themes link to human beings and their place in the universe, in which the natural world plays a central role.

In *Morphology of Desire* (fig. 1) as in *Crucifixion* of the same year, the flow of space created through washes of color marked by bursts of

rich pigment—in this case a pale white gray to blue shifting ground, punctuated with radiant red then black to blue to orange forms—suggests a visionary atmosphere defined by the floating presences of brilliant red, twisting forms, and solid black and blue bodies. What we see defies absolute definition. Instead, what we respond to in this moving "landscape" of color, blurred line, shape, and bursts of pigment are the impressions generated. If it is a reality, it is one conjured up through sensual effects. *Psychology of Morphology* (1939, no. 6) portrays a more traditional landscape with the suggestion of a horizon line and yellow foreground against a blue-black atmospheric sky. But again, the ground is dissected by the flux of red to yellow to white forms that float and spin on various planes. The picture space constantly shifts, drawing the viewer in then out, back further within the "scape" depicted. Onslow Ford explained the way he and Matta defined it: "The eye only perceives a section of reality and psychological morphology gives a fuller view" (Sawin 1995: 29).

By the time England and France entered World War II in August 1939, Matta had established himself among the Surrealists in Paris, along with a circle of English, French, Spanish, and American artists, all of whom had brought fresh ideas to the movement. Together they shared ideas and activities but did not profess a single unified program. While united in their shared distrust of rationalism and nationalism and the ultimate goal of expanding human consciousness, each followed his own visual agenda (Sawin 1995: 49). Matta figured in this group by virtue of his artistic project as well as by his extraordinary ability for visual and verbal expression. In the May 1939 issue of the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*, André Breton singled out Matta as one of the new innovators of Surrealism, as "One of our youngest friends, Matta is already at the peak of a brilliant pictorial production.... Every one of the pictures painted by Matta since last year is a festival where all of the games of chance are played" (146).

New York, The Surrealist Splinter Group and the Beginnings of Abstract Expressionism

In October 1939, Matta arrived in New York and began creating some of the most extraordinary paintings of his career. Early on, Matta met with American artists including Jackson Pollock, William Baziotes, Peter Busa, and Gerome Kamrowski, some of whom later gathered in his studio for sessions charting his brand of Surrealism. Matta was drawn to their ideas and was influenced by the country's landscape. The twenty-seven-year-old Chilean's presence was soon recognized, so that by 1940 he was invited to exhibit at the Julien Levy Gallery, one of two spaces that showcased Abstract and Surrealist art in New York. As Levy recalled, Matta presented himself in the gallery as

> ...confident, mercurial and produced a portfolio of explosive crayon drawings and vowing he would complete enough canvases for an exhibition within the next two months.... Matta burst on the New York scene as if he considered this country a sort of dark continent, his Africa where he could trade dubious wares, charm the natives and entertain scintillating disillusions. He was chock full of premature optimism and impatient disappointment; believing ardently in almost everything and in absolutely nothing, as he believed ardently and painfully in himself. For me he was easily the most fertile and the most untrustworthy of the younger Surrealists (109).

By 1941, Matta and his version of Surrealism assumed a growing prominence in New York art circles. Onslow Ford gave a series of lectures on their brand of Surrealism at the New School of Social Research. The talks gained a critical audience and proved influential in spreading Matta's ideas, upon which Onslow Ford focused repeatedly. Essentially the British artist explained Matta's approach as uniting the unconscious thoughts of the individual to the viewer through a non-figurative symbolism within fluctuating, non-Euclidean spaces that condensed all time into a single moment (Sawin 1995: 161–162). Far from the Freudian interpretation typical of 1920s Surrealism, Matta pursued a visual language without obvious imagery, but one which followed his own set pictorial structure and iconography that combined elements of nature, the occult, science, and math. Whether or not today's viewer can interpret his system is less important than the fact that he experimented and extracted his ideas both through the provocative compositions he painted during the War and through the lively dialogues he enjoyed with other artists.

In *Untitled* (1940, no. 7), for example, radiant fields of red and green surround a flow of seemingly vegetative pathways, one in yellows and oranges, another in greens; fluid concentric circles of color dotted with a dark center emerge from the

pale ground surrounding them. Infused with bold pigments, it appears as an evocatively blurred, microscopic glance at plant life.

During this moment in American art, when traditional Realism and post-Cubist Abstraction dominated the scene, Matta and the European immigrant talents disrupted the landscape. The Chilean and the émigré artists who followed in 1941–42—Breton, Tanguy, Max Ernst, Onslow Ford, and Kurt Seligmann—ushered in an entirely new visual program. Surrealism struck the Americans as illustrations from bad dreams. Matta's work, for example, was described by one reviewer as "...full of shards and roots of teeth, spars and mangled bodies, what does it matter that Matta is as mad as a hatta" (J.W.T. 270).

Nonetheless, some New York institutions displayed a willingness to explore Surrealist ideas. Museum of Modern Art exhibitions in 1941 brought attention to themes important to Surrealism: "Indian Art of the U.S.," presented the ideas of myth and traditional cultures, and the Joan Miró exhibition emphasized biomorphism. Many of the New York dealers, often European immigrants themselves, exhibited the Surrealists. Moreover, the art market grew in 1941, responding favorably to the influx of European-influenced art. The art receiving this attention was lumped under the heading "School of Paris," a title given to a show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. The exhibition earned various reviews, of which two mentioned Matta's significant role. In an article for *Decision Magazine* entitled, "The School of Paris Comes to New York," art collector Sidney Janus restricted his words to but four artists, Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, Max Ernst, and to "a young artist of talent and temperament—the irrepressible Matta...who...paint[s] the colossal structure of life as science relates it...by a fusion of techniques from painting, architecture, fumage and photography..." (Sawin 1995: 169, 173, 182). The second review to mention Matta was by Rosamund Frost in *Magazine of Art*, calling him "Matta, the young man people are keeping their eye on..."; while in 1942, Frost reviewed his first solo show at Matisse gallery stating, "Imagine a painter of thirty who has invented an idiom so outside the run of experience that this seems the only line along which to approach his work" (*Magazine of Art* Dec. 1941; *ArtNews* Apr. 1942).

Fomented by his own ambitious project and continuous contact with the surrounding painters, Matta's influence grew among American artists over 1941–42. Abstract Expressionist artist Robert Motherwell met Matta in 1941 and spent that summer living, working, and debating with him in Taxco, Mexico. According to Motherwell, he learned a decade of Surrealism from his friend Matta that summer. Motherwell created his first significant body of drawings over those months. He later credited Matta with having a catalytic effect on his art because of his "exuberance and enthusiasm about new developments in painting." The New York painter explained, "I was as close to Matta then as anybody can be. He is a kind of intellectual Don Juan who seduces then moves on" (Smith and Dartnall 16; Sawin 1995: 186).

Mexico provided Matta exposure to the rugged, traumatic landscape of volcanic mountains and to the resonance of indigenous culture. Through his friendship with Mexico based artist Wolfgang Paalen, Matta learned about pre-Columbian scientific and natural systems and of the rich beliefs of the Mexican Indian cultures. Moreover, the eruption of the Paricutin volcano during Matta's stay stimulated the artist's fascination with the earth's terrifying force and triggered the comparisons he drew between himself and nature (Fletcher 245; Sawin 1995: 186). Perhaps his own childhood impressions of the monumental force of the Andean mountains in Chile were rekindled during his Mexico stay; in any case, the volcanic peaks he observed in turmoil left an impression on his art. Exploding bursts of yellow and orange break through planes of pigments in masterpieces like *The Earth is Man* (1942, CGP 120)[5] or *Here, Sir, Fire, Eat!* (1942, CGP 115). Matta's view of the intertwined life of nature and man that informs his work is revealed in the following statement:

> A landscape is at peace whenever there is no visible catastrophe, and yet ecologically, it is violent and devouring. One must grasp what lies behind appearance. Life is not just anthropomorphic, it is also feats of boldness, equations and bursts of energy, affection and desire (Ferrari 108).

By 1942, Surrealism was widely accepted in New York, and Matta's place within the circle was deemed extremely influential. Matta's exposure grew in the art world beginning with his inclusion in a publication of an artist's group portfolio, the first of its kind by American artists since the Depression. In 1942, his profile rose further with the dissemination of the Surrealist journal *VVV*,

which Matta created with Breton to replace the group's earlier publication *View*. Exhibitions at Matisse Gallery and Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery commanded notice as well. Matta's ideas, such as the concept of "transparent worlds," influenced by Ouspensky's theories and by Marcel Duchamp's idea of *passage*, informed Breton's new myth of the time, "The Great Transparency" (Sawin 1995: 191, 199). Matta incorporated the idea of transparency—as demonstrated in Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23, CGP 39), with its cracks, suspended images, and surrounding clear space—in various paintings from 1939 onward. In *Years of Fear* (1941, CGP 114), for example, swirling veils of gray, black, and white washes flow around a complex web of lines projecting out in an indecipherable labyrinth, linking us to worlds unseen within the third dimension.[6]

During 1943–44, the influence of Marcel Duchamp was keenly apparent in the young artist's work. Webs of lines and floating rhomboids, called "mobiles" by Duchamp, figured frequently in Matta's paintings, as in *Children's Fear of Idols* (1943, no. 10) and *Untitled* (1945, nos. 17 and 18). In *Children's Fear of Idols*, the network of lines—like the web of cracks in Duchamp's *The Large Glass*—extend out and circle around pale outlines of floating rhombuses, part of the system of symbols painstakingly conceived by Matta. Between smeared and/or fluidly rendered pale white lines with barbed ends, fine tracings of yellow lines fan off or circle repeatedly into the ground's washy black space.

It is critical to note that Duchamp, who arrived in the United States from France in 1942, had received little written recognition this side of the ocean—that is until 1944, when Matta published a booklet on the artist with Katherine Dreier, the collector who, in 1943 loaned *The Great Glass* for exhibition to the Museum of Modern Art (Smith and Dartnall 23–24). The mutual respect between Duchamp and Matta was such that the latter created his own *The Bachelors 20 Years After* (1943, CGP 40)—a painting defined by a coffee grinder-type form, with concentric circles spiraling in a space where floating black rhomboids suggest different visual dimensions.

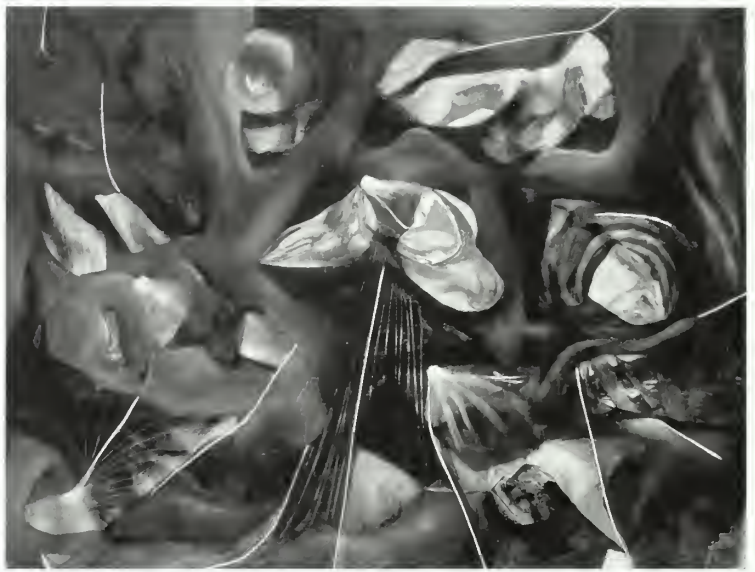

Fig. 2
Matta, *Nada*, 1943, Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 36 1/4 in., Collection of Michael Shiffman, Los Angeles, CA.

To many, Matta was seen as the artist through whom others interpreted Duchamp. In the booklet Matta stated:

> Duchamp has found the key whereby to liberate images from their common meaning and to represent the object by an image which is pliable to the mechanism of sight and expands the consciousness. He has broken the association between the onlooker and in breaking down these limitations frees the spirit of man (Sawin 1995: 320–21).

Likewise, Duchamp openly applauded Matta's visual investigations: "Matta's first contribution to Surrealist painting was the discovery of regions of space hitherto unexplored in the realm of art.... Still a young man, Matta is the most profound painter of his generation" (Sanouillet and Peterson 154).

In *Nada* (fig. 2)—another horizonless, ambiguous space—single white lines break from the heaving, shifting rubble of layered hues, while pale blue-gray washes flow around openings scraped into the canvas ground. Flashes of layered pigments, red and blue, yellow and green, flame within the turbulence depicted. In this painting, in particular, one notes the fluid forms of layered colors, the ideas New York School artist Arshile Gorky gleaned from Matta and

incorporated into his Abstract Expressionist paintings of the 1940s. During this period, Matta's influence on the artist was widely acknowledged by artists and critics such as Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg, the former of whom described the Chilean as a kind of brother figure from whom Gorky learned to build his own visual language (Schapiro 181; Greenberg 13).

Matta's determination to chart his personal vision and convince others of his ideas led to his splinter from the Surrealist group in autumn 1942. Although it lasted only into the winter of 1943, Matta met periodically in his studio with American artists Motherwell, William Baziotes, Peter Busa, Gerome Kamrowski, and Jackson Pollock. Promoting his artistic philosophy, he encouraged them to pursue new means for representing reality in constant flux. He discussed his own symbols for indicating natural elements like fire, water, and rocks, as well as his use of grids and concentric circles to visualize the concepts of space, time, movement, and transparency. Matta, pushing them to draw without forethought and to concentrate on elemental forms such as male/female, water, fire, etc., was an exacting tutor. His students did not remain long in his sessions, but the impact of his ideas was widely acknowledged. Peter Busa described Matta as the artist who "personalized surrealism for the younger artists" (Smith and Dartnall 21). Motherwell later mentioned that these meetings were the start of Abstract Expressionism and even non-attendees, like Mark Rothko and Boris Margo, were known to have admired and responded to Matta's work at the time (Kozloff 23).

The fact that Matta attempted to expand the Surrealist objective, thereby modifying Breton's program, and that he convinced the American painters to follow his approach, demonstrates the confidence with which Matta assumed his prominent artistic role. Throughout this time he was judged as a force with which to be reckoned. He came from abroad but was not seen strictly as a European; rather, he was viewed as someone with a new perspective, a vision, and an ability to convince others of his ideas. He arrived in New York with the group of World War II émigré artists but was not an established, famous figure like his fellow refugees, Léger, Mondrian, Dalí, Chagall, and Ernst, all of whom had generated admiration and some resentment in Manhattan. Instead, he was the age of the young American artists and as Serge Guilbaut described him in his book, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*: "Matta was the young eccentric who other artists took seriously" (Guilbaut 73; Rubin 35).

His paintings deviated from traditional Surrealism, and his engaging personality and deliberate moves to forge links with the Americans elevated his role within the art scene. As *Art News* writer Rosamund Frost described him in 1944,

> Altogether it is clear to see why Matta has never been classified. He holds himself nearest the Surrealists, but would like to rebuild their ideas into a school of his own. Whether he would have a following is questionable for few painters indeed are so geared, either technically or imaginatively. More probably he will remain an isolated phenomenon, result of the mingling of the Iberian race, French intellectualism, the American continent, and the modern age (18).

Recognized as a phenom, Matta served as an important link between European ideas and the American artists. As former Museum of Modern Art Curator William Rubin explained: "It was Matta—who emerged in the early years of the war as both a painter and a personality—that became the bridge between Surrealism and the younger Americans" (34).

Paintings such as *Inscape* (1943, no. 11) demonstrate both Matta's Surrealist aesthetic and the visual influence that he provided to the American painters. Pervading *Inscape* is a mysticism as well as an awareness of the horrors of war. It is a dizzying, kaleidoscopic vision in which his transparent veils in washes of green, pale blue, and gray are dramatically punctuated by flat black rhomboids that float on the surface. Black lines project from them, dividing the painting into sections where the veiled swirl of the background recedes deeply into the picture plane. Matta's "astral egg," the gold orb glowing in the canvas center, implies the hope of a new world amid the chaos throughout the picture quadrants.

By 1944–45, the realities of war weighed heavily on Matta, and he introduced disturbing figuration into his transparent veils of color. Matta was now considered an American talent. James Johnson Sweeney, influential critic and later curator, referred to Matta in an article listing him, among Milton Avery, Morris Graves, Arshile Gorky, and Jackson Pollock, as one of the five artists who held "...the promise of a new and encouraging phase of American art" (276). But

Matta soon altered his visual language, and ultimately, began to risk his reputation among artists in New York. He incorporated the figure in his paintings at the moment when the American art world was beginning to champion a version of the emerging expressionistic abstraction that Matta had practiced previously, albeit under the guise of Surrealism.

Enter the Figure

Not only did Matta add figures to his extraordinary fields of color, but he also conceived strange, humanoid beings and portrayed them on a monumental scale, as in *X-Space and the Ego* (1945, CGP 140–141). Always sensitive to the human condition, the artist now accounted for both the physical and the mental atrocities of war, as well as technology's dehumanizing effects. Matta filled the endless space of *X-Space and the Ego*'s vast canvas with detailed drawings of elongated figures with monstrous heads. They are brutally bombarded by the repeating fan of concentric lines, circles, and angles that strangle and pull them into and out of the spray of gold, red, green, and white layers of paint on the surface. Without the labyrinth of figures, the canvas bears the washy, splattered, sprayed, evocative effects of a full-blown Abstract Expressionist canvas. Marked by his diabolical figures, it is a deeply disturbing vision, even a nightmare.

Although Matta had incorporated figures for many years in his drawings, this was the beginning of their inclusion in his paintings, and the critical response he received was primarily negative. Noted critics such as Clement Greenberg, deemed these paintings cartoonish, calling Matta the "prince of comic-strippers" (13). Moreover, the American artists who followed Matta rejected his figuration since their concerns were now centered on the language of abstraction, rather than on the mysticism and symbolism he had long addressed. Artist Gerome Kamrowski, for example, who participated in his splinter Surrealist sessions, attacked Matta for his new figurative paintings, telling him he was "doing science fiction" (Sawin 1995: 274; Seitz 164).

Undaunted by criticism and, more importantly, committed as always to his personal vision, Matta continued, from 1944 onward, to fill his canvases with the fleshless, totemesque figures. He called them "vitreurs" implying veiled, transparent beings, indicated through their long, fleshless forms. Matta's name for these figures was probably linked to Breton's new myth of 1942: the "Great Invisibles," in which beings that exist beyond man's visual reference in time and space are camouflaged within a transparent cover (Breton 1978: 216–17). Matta's prototypes for these figures included the ethnographic sculptures of Oceania, Egypt, and the Mediterranean, as well as the slender, elongated sculptures of Alberto Giacometti. In 1943 Matta purchased the Italian sculptor's plaster cast of *Hands holding the Void* (1934, CGP 277), a figure whose excessively long body and limbs offered a vivid resemblance to Matta's beings (Smith and Dartnall 24). *La Femme Affamée* (1945, no. 15) is a straightforward portrait of a typical Matta figure in all its unnerving monstrousness. Painted during the height of personal chaos for Matta, *La Femme* is a tragic figure, screaming in horror, shackled to a metal plate, and mutilated to the point at which her face and features are unrecognizable.

These figurative canvases demonstrated a new priority for Matta. In *A Grave Situation* (1946, no. 19), the figure is an eerie green, robot-like creature standing within a classic, expansive Matta space. Doors, windows, and pieces of machines hang about him and veer toward his body with its multiple, insect-like heads and excessively long arms. The effects and constant threat of violence pervades the scene. The washy, deep orange and gold space expands behind the monster into a green atmosphere divided by an architectural array of black lines and inner spaces reminiscent of the structure of lines in Duchamp's *Great Glass*. It is another large canvas that speaks of a world gone profoundly awry. Matta explained these figurative paintings:

> I was attempting to use a social morphology, not a personal psycho-morphology to move away from the intimate, imaginary forms...towards the cultural, totemic expressions of civilizations...the formations of cultures in confrontation with social landscapes (Ferrari 229).

His themes now centered upon societal conflicts, rather than man's internal challenges.

In spite of the negative response by American critics and artists to his figuration, Matta continued to receive extraordinary attention during the

mid-forties in New York. He created the cover for the 1944 Surrealist magazine *VVV*; he had solo shows in 1945 and '46 at Pierre Matisse Gallery; he exhibited in "European Artists in America" at the Whitney Museum; he was included both in a group show organized by noted art expert Howard Putzel, as well as in another at the Hugo Gallery with Gorky, Wifredo Lam, Isamu Noguchi, and Frederick Kiesler; he exhibited in a 1947 Surrealism show at Galerie Maeght and, later that same year, in the "Large Scale Modern Paintings" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (which included Picasso, Matisse, Beckman, Léger, and Pollock). Moreover, he had his first solo show in Paris in 1947 at the Galerie Rene Drouin with a text written by Breton, who explained Matta's new system of figuration. He showed at the Art Institute of Chicago and earned the publication of an important essay on his work by James Thrall Soby in *Magazine of Art* (Smith and Dartnall 26–27). In 1948, Matta showed at Matisse Gallery in New York and at the William Copley Gallery in Beverly Hills and perhaps, most importantly, with the highly respected literary critic, Lionel Abel, Matta produced *Instead*, an avant-garde journal that included cutting edge philosophy, poetry, and art. He contributed to three of the five issues before the publication folded (Smith and Dartnall 26–28).

Despite these successes and the art market support that accompanied them, by 1948 Matta had effectively separated from the New York artists and was estranged from the Surrealist group as well. Diverging dramatically from the priorities of his contemporaries were Matta's beliefs that the artist plays an active role in society (whether or not people can directly interpret his message), and that the figure helped to explain the reality that he expected art could present. As Motherwell stated later, "Matta always consciously took the position that the message is everything in art: colors, forms, etc. are sugar coating to get people to dig the message that reality is more important than art" (Mattison 92).

In terms of Surrealism, Matta always pursued his own vision, never amending his approach to meet the tenets of the movement; hence his move away from the group was not surprising. However, the break with the Surrealists in 1948 was due to a personal matter more than an aesthetic or theoretical disagreement. Matta's eventual expulsion from the group corresponded with his decision to leave New York and move to Europe.[7]

Europe and an International Presence

Upon leaving the United States, Matta eventually settled in Rome where he resided until 1955, making frequent visits to Paris. He lived the rest of his life in Paris, London, and Tarquinia in a former monastery built upon Etruscan ruins. Because he was little known on the Continent, Matta's first years in Europe after World War II were spent building new relationships with artists and scientists. His paintings remained populated with the elongated humanoids and the mechanistic forms that appear like satellite shields, often bursting apart, floating, and attacking space and the figures within it. The content explored in these pictures frequently bore social significance, a priority Matta reiterated in a text written for a Santiago journal during a visit to Chile in 1948. Like many artists in Latin America, such as Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, Matta saw the artist's role as social and political, his goal being "...to discover new affective relationships between men" (Carter 70; Smith and Dartnall 28).

In *Je M'arche* (1949, no. 22) a single humanoid warrior with an exaggerated baboon-like face stands with his bowstring poised to shoot a horrific "arrow." Beneath him a pile of indistinguishable carcasses or the detritus of exploded machines surrounds his feet. Whether this is a commentary on war or on the dreadful consequences of technology's effects, there can be no doubt of the artist's criticism of the individual and society.

Modern existence projects a high-tech, sinister tone in Matta's painting *The Unthinkable* (1957, no. 33). Enclosed within four, hovering but not touching, white walls, within a foggy gray, space, a mechanism with extended, twirling yellow blades chops four other yellow, monstrous machines bearing propellers and long pieces jutting out in all directions. One such device harbors sufficient force to blow through the wall toward a deep green, skeletal creature with a red and yellow bulbous head bursting fire, lurking outside. The title dramatically captures the effect of this painting.

Throughout the canvases Matta painted over the fifty-plus years of his post-New York career, certain visual ideas appear repeatedly. He evokes an endless, shifting space that conveys a palpable level of movement throughout the field. He manipulates pigments so

that, both in color and in the means of application, they conjure up vaporous, unearthly spaces, the metallic shine of a machine piece, or the excessive brilliance and tone of a world sickened by technological disaster. He conveys themes of mythological significance, futuristic warfare, and tales of phantasmic creatures undersea, in the universe or in unknown worlds. Finally, although many of his paintings are incomprehensible in precise terms, the created effect imparts a blending of the conscious and unconscious, the literal and the imaginary, that rarely fails to unsettle the viewer.

The Upheaval of One's Ocean (1972, no. 45) conjures up a world beneath the sea. Delineated by fluid black lines, the painting projects an olive-hued cavern surrounded by craters and mounds, the latter bearing bulbous forms, each crowned with a red ball. Golden, elongated figures float within the murky depths, guarding the cave. Bursting from the top of the green enclosure are pale, blue-white, luminescent streams of air bubbles, bleeding up into the blue-green washes of color filling the canvas. Similar to the flow of ocean currents, Matta's layers of blue and ivy-toned pigments pull the viewer into the watery and, perhaps psychological, depths of this aquatic world—from cave to leagues beyond.

Matta's sculptures, such as *Design of Intention* (1970, no. 42), also project a sense of shifting space and movement. The pattern of repeated lines constructed as wire tendrils with balls at each end, project from metal plates, tall rectangles, and bent planes. The repeated wire lines wiggle, separate, and jut in various directions, all but vibrating, with pent-up energy. Like Matta's seemingly shifting planes on canvas, these moving wires convey a sense of evolving space and time—actual and implied.

Although Matta lived in Europe from 1948 until his death, he exhibited repeatedly in the United States, primarily in Chicago, where many collectors sought his work, and in New York City, where besides gallery and various museum exhibitions, he was honored with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1957. Overall, however, Matta's place in the U.S. art world never again reached the prominence it commanded during World War II. Matta's exclusion was due in part to his leaving New York and not returning to the U.S., but also because his visual project, the Surrealist and figurative canvases, diverged widely from the art celebrated by American artists, critics, and curators in the second half of the twentieth century. Even so, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York recently purchased one of Matta's enormous (180 x 87 inches), wartime canvases, *Being With*, 1946. It contains the artist's characteristic elongated, robotic figures suffering the terrors and tortures of war. William Lieberman, the Metropolitan curator who orchestrated the acquisition, compared *Being With* to Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and heralded Matta's canvas as one of the first monumental easel paintings seen by New York artists in the 1940s (Vogel 2).

Matta's international reputation continues today. Until his death in 2002, many Europeans considered him one of the greatest living painters. He has exhibited extensively worldwide, has received commissions for murals at UNESCO and the Universidad Tecnológico in Santiago, and has had retrospectives at the Pompidou Center in Paris, at museums in Valencia, Barcelona, and in Santiago, and has received countless distinguished prizes in arts and letters from Japan to Austria to Chile. Although he visited his homeland repeatedly over the years (except in the mid 1970s when he was exiled for protesting against Chilean Dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet), he never returned to live in the region (Carter 70; Bozo 275–79).

Ultimately, Matta was one of the first truly prominent international artists from Latin America. He was not of a single nation or one region, as he said years later, "I am an outsider, identified with outsiders, all of my life has been spent farawaying and unfarawaying" (Carrasco 41). In today's world, the international artist born in Mexico or Brazil, who feels at home and respected in many cities, studios, and art markets is commonplace. Gabriel Orozco from Mexico, Ernesto Neto from Brazil, Alfredo Jaar from Chile, exhibit in, command an influence over, and have entered collections in Tokyo, Helsinki, St. Louis, and Buenos Aires. In the 1940s no other artist from the region achieved international fame without regard to his Latin American origins. Others, such as Diego Rivera, Joaquin Torres-García, and later Frida Kahlo, and Fernando Botero, drew attention, but were recognized primarily as Latin American talents whose art projected their cultural origins. Matta ruptured this traditional profile, just as his visual project diverged from all others. That is to say, his work did not exhibit the typical Latin American religious or cultural iconography or the realist visual language by which the region's art is too often defined. He provoked and surprised the art world with his ideas, the-

matic and technical, blending social, psychological, and scientific systems, forging ahead, despite criticism and pressures to the contrary, and earning respect along the way. As William Rubin remarked, "For me, [Matta] was and remains one of the relatively few, truly inventive and independent painters of the 20th century..." (37). Ultimately, Matta was just that: a truly independent artist, one not to be defined within the confines of Surrealism or his Latin American nationality. As the esteemed American art critic Meyer Schapiro stated: Matta's legacy lies within "...the idea of the canvas as a field of prodigious excitement, unloosed energies...a new futurism of the organic as well as the mechanical forces" (181). He provoked the world to see a future, one without borders, visual, physical, or psychological.

Notes

1 See Octavio Paz, "Vestibule," in *Matta*.

2 The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda wrote in his autobiography, "In the twenties, cultural life in our countries depended exclusively on Europe, with a few rare and heroic exceptions. A cosmopolitan elite was active in each of our republics, and the writers who belonged to the ruling class lived in Paris....In fact, as soon as I had the first little tidbit of youthful fame, people in the street started asking me: 'Well, what are you doing here? You must go to Paris.' Neruda p. 64.

3 Not only did Matta not return to Chile to live, but he became a French citizen in 1973 (Carrasco 20 and 108).

4 Photographs of Poincare's models were in circulation, and Matta would have seen them. For example, Man Ray took photographs of them which later appeared in a special edition of *Cahiers D'Art* in 1939. See Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*, p. 28.

5 CGP and page numbers are used as an abbreviated notation for the exhibition catalogue, *Matta* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1985).

6 A comparable web of lines was used by Duchamp to install the "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition at the Reid Mansion in New York, Oct.-Nov. 1942. Strings reached from a wall of paintings to the ceiling to the next wall of paintings, creating an evocative, erratic web of white lines filling the space. See photograph of the installation in *Matta*, p. 273.

7 Matta was expelled from the Surrealist group on October 25, 1948 in a letter sent to the members accusing him of "Moral ignominy and intellectual disqualification." Breton had received an anonymous letter some time before, attempting to blame Matta for the suicide of Arshile Gorky in July 1948. Matta had had an affair with Gorky's estranged wife which some believed lead to the artist's suicide. Nothing was ever proven, but the malicious letter caused a rupture in the Surrealist camp, with several artists breaking from the group as a result. Matta was invited to rejoin the Surrealists in the late 1950's, but declined; the movement as a whole, was never again a unified artistic group. See Sawin, p. 410.

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The Eye with which God Looks at You: The Sacramental Realism of Roberto Matta

Roberto S. Goizueta

Roberto Matta had a complex, conflicted relationship to the Catholic Church in which he was reared and educated. Of his early Jesuit schooling in Chile, he observed that it "was administered by third-class priests...in a totally superficial manner, bereft of all mystery. No one spoke to me of universal love, of the invisible. That all came to me later, from my own experience" (Haim 23). Like so many Latin American intellectuals, however, though anticlerical he was not anti-Catholic or anti-religious as such. Indeed, he would later credit Catholicism with fostering in him that passionate love of life that pulses through all his work:

> Why religions are interesting to me is because one of them taught me as a very young boy how to love and how to love very many things. I was brought up by the Jesuits to become a good Catholic. Actually, I was tamed by them more than brought up by them, because I had to break from that and start growing up myself. The Catholics invent martyrs and saints that drew my balls, my organs of love. After my religious upbringing, I could use love for living. What's important is to wake up your love, your emotional systems and sentiments of life, your identity between feelings and the world (Miller 10).

In a 1987 interview he admitted that, at the age of 75, he was still trying to be a "good Catholic": "for years, I have received communion every first Friday of the month because one had to receive communion every month, for two years I have attended mass every Sunday..." (qtd. in Carrasco 1987: 115).

Despite his distrust of hierarchical clericalism and its attendant theology, Matta's work expresses profoundly religious, even Catholic sensibilities. More specifically, Matta introduces to us a world that bears the unmistakable imprint of a Catholic sensibility irreducible to the "religion of the priests." If Matta explicitly rejected the overly rigid, conceptualist religion of his Jesuit teachers, his later discovery of "the invisible" and "mystery" as a cosmic life force was characteristically (though not uniquely) Latin American, Catholic, and indeed Ignatian. In reference to Matta's "mystical sense," Josefina Alix notes that "it is hard to erase a religious education which infuses everything and, even if rejected intellectually, the cultural mechanisms that sustain it endure forever" (23). What Matta rejected was "faith in idols. Generally, when people say God, they are speaking of idols, they are speaking of how these are represented in a hieratic, imposing, and frightening form..." (qtd. in Carrasco 1987: 189). In contrast to such idolatry, Matta had faith in a God who "animates souls [*'anima las ánimas'*].... God is that which animates and, if you don't see in each thing what animates it, your view is very superficial, your grasp of things is very superficial" (Carrasco 1987: 188).

Though always at war with his Chilean roots, and undeniably internationalist by intent, Matta could never completely leave behind his religious and cultural roots. As an international exile, never fully at home in any country, Matta was a truly global citizen whose art was equally universal. Like all authentic universality, however, his always retained the perceptible traces of the

particular *locus* in which it was birthed; like all great art, his speaks a universal message precisely insofar as it does so through a local idiom, even if that idiom is constantly in flux, drawing on multiple sources. Describing his ambivalent relationship to his roots, Matta could thus admit: "it is not, exactly, that I have broken with Chile. The fellow metamorphized; something else began to grow from him, like a graft" (Carrasco 1987: 41).

Any attempt to establish causal links in the artistic process will necessarily be precarious and speculative. In what follows, then, I will not so much argue for causal links as indicate points of convergence that suggest possible influences—between the Latin American Catholic culture in which Matta was reared and the artistic vision so dramatically expressed in his oeuvre.

The Catholic Imagination

It is by now commonplace among theological scholars that the single most distinctive characteristic of the Catholic imagination is its fundamentally sacramental worldview. Echoing many other contemporary Catholic theologians, Thomas Groome explains the significance of sacramentality for Catholicism:

> Catholic Christianity emphasizes that the divine-human covenant is enacted within the everyday of life; here is where "it's at" between ourselves and God. Here God outreaches and engages with us. Here we respond as responsive partners. Catholic tradition gathers up this conviction that our covenant is realized through the ordinary of life in the principle of sacramentality. Nothing is more significant to what makes us Catholic than the sacramental principle. It epitomizes a Catholic outlook on life in the world; if allowed only one word to describe Catholic imagination, we'd have to say sacramental. Theologian Richard McBrien writes, "No theological principle or focus is more characteristic of Catholicism or more central to its identity than the principle of sacramentality.... St. Augustine defined a sacrament as "a visible sign of invisible grace." The sacramental principle proposes that everything in our life-world can be such a sign. In the classic phrase of Ignatius of Loyola, Christians are invited "to see God in all things".... As theologian Rosemary Haughton writes, "Sacraments are extraordinary experiences of the ordinary" (84–85).

Such an imagination eschews easy epistemological dichotomies, affirming the inherent value of the sensorial world as the visible expression of its invisible ground. To be a human person is to be both angel and beast simultaneously.[1]

The Catholic imagination is one in which the borders between nature and supernature, matter and spirit, person and cosmos are porous: "It is good and proper to be sensualists, dreamers, players, thinkers, doers, and lovers. We should live and enjoy the world in which we live. Catholicism is at its best when it is most openly world affirming, sacramental, iconic, and earthy" (Cunningham 119). Matta himself adverts to the link between the Catholic God, sensorial experience, and artistic representation: "the Catholic religion, which teaches you to love so many saints, so many angels, so many differences, provides a kind of multiplicity of affects; much more than, for example, the Quaker religion, which loves only an abstract God who cannot be represented" (Carrasco 1987: 155). It is through such affects, through the senses, that one encounters the God who animates all things: "My world is a world of earth, a world of roots. I want to kiss. I wish one could conkiss [*conbesar*] rather than converse [*conversar*].... I think that if society were different, instead of going to a bar or a restaurant I would go to a kissatorium [*besatorio*]..." (Carrasco 1987: 195). Given the Catholic affirmation of divine representability, it is no coincidence that Catholic cultures have historically been so conducive to artistic production and creativity, particularly in the visual arts.

One might argue that Matta's own conflict and eventual rupture with Abstract Expressionism paralleled the iconoclastic controversies that have dotted the history of Christianity from the very beginning. Matta refused to relinquish the image, the representation that makes the invisible visible: "Matta's painting is representational without being figurative, it is always seeking to represent in new forms what has not even appeared to human sight; it is an attempt to make visible what has until now remained secret, a revelation of the invisible" (Carrasco 1990: 12). These words of Matta's friend, the philosopher Eduardo Carrasco—"a revelation of the invisible"—would be an apt definition of the Catholic notion of sacrament. And it was precisely Matta's sacramental imagination that provoked the ire of his New York colleagues. "The hostility," Matta later recalled, "came from a fear of using images, of trying to imagine that which is transparent" (Miller 14).

After more than 500 years of a Catholic presence that has made the continent home to the largest Catholic population in the world, Latin America itself has inevitably been deeply influenced by the Catholic affirmation of the sensorial as the sacrament of God's self-revelation. Indeed, this sacramental imagination was initially quite congenial to the analogously organic, holistic world of the indigenous cultures encountered in the "New World." If Latin America is today characterized by a racial-cultural mixture, or "mestizaje," it is due in no small part to the (ironic) similarities between the Catholic sacramental sense and the indigenous reverence for the cosmos as a reality in which matter and spirit are integrally related, the place where one encounters the spiritual world in the course of everyday life. "The medieval Catholicism of the Spanish and the magical-religious expressions of the indigenous," writes the influential Peruvian art critic Juan Acha, "had many points of contact, which today have not only disappeared but are incomprehensible for us" (63). Indeed, argues Acha, the Latin American experience of *mestizaje*—i.e., the historical Latin American willingness to synthesize differences rather than oppose or exclude them—lives on today in a Latin American art that sublates both indigenous influences and internationalist intentions in order to generate a new synthesis, a mestizo art whose power derives precisely from the dialectical tension between the indigenous (particular) and the international (universal).

The capacity for metamorphosis implicit in the historical experience of *mestizaje* is at the heart of Latin American identity—if we can speak of this in the singular. The mestizo/a neither excludes nor assimilates differences, rather he or she integrates them as factors shaping an ongoing, changing reality.[2] Matta's resistance to any sort of cultural straightjacket, his extraordinary openness to otherness in all its guises, and his willingness to integrate new influences into an ever-changing personal identity are all characteristic of the Latin American historical experience. In some deep sense, to be Latin American is by definition to be an exile from *all* cultures; the person born in a mestizo or mulatto culture (regardless of his or her particular race) will always be neither/nor...neither indigenous nor European, neither Latin American nor North American, neither Chilean nor Basque. This sense of perpetual exile, of identity-in-transit, is conveyed in Matta's own 1983 poem, *El Medterráneo y el verbo América* (also a series of 1984 lithographs under the same title).[3]

Towards a Conception of the Incomprehensible

Transition was, for Matta, characteristic of all reality. He was the art world's Heraclitus. Roberto Matta's art expresses a worldview which, far from devaluing the visible world, perceives this as the organic, dynamic transformation, or morphology of the Spirit, the "anima," that animates all things in its desire to become visible. The material is but another aspect of the spiritual; these are indistinguishable dimensions of all life. "What is limited," observes Carrasco of Matta's work, "is nothing other than one of the faces of what is unlimited, but in no way a different essence..." (1990: 20). Such a worldview is evident, for example, in *Art-Cadia* (1982, no. 49)[4], where symbols of physical, biological life are intermingled with symbols of spiritual life. An inseminated ovum, in the upper left, and a phallus, on the right, are connected by an angel that flies between them. In a posture that suggests care and reverence, the central figure in the painting carries a chalice-like object, as if in procession. In relation to this central figure, then, the ovum is transformed into a eucharistic host. Before this Elysian scene, the figures on the left lift their arms in awe and praise. And the vibrant colors that frame the scene suggest, indiscriminately, ocean and sky, fire and water, spirit and matter.

In this association of Christian symbols with natural symbols, the Christian world with the mythological world of these indeterminate figures, Matta emphasizes the natural character of Christian symbols. Access to the supernatural can only be through its representation in the natural world; there can be no disembodied, "pure" religious experience. A god "who cannot be represented" can only be a false god. In turn, a God who is Love must, by definition, be representable, expressible, communicable. At the same time, only because the human is the invisible-become-visible is any encounter with Mystery possible:

> We can define Matta's humanism as the attempt to conceive the relation between the human being and Otherness without any anthropomorphism.... The infinity of the infinite could never appear as such if we conceive the human being as finite. In order that the infinite make itself present in the human, the human being must be infinite and the relation between infinite object and infinite subject should disappear. If the subject were simply finite, the infinite could never make itself present. Therefore, the human being forms a part of the otherness that reveals itself (Carrasco 1990: 60).

Against a subjectivist art conceived as the artist's own self-expression, the evolution of Matta's art is toward a sacramental realism that strives to discover in the world the self-expression of Mystery without in any way degenerating into a naïve realism or naturalism; what is depicted is not the real as such, but the *essence* of the real, the invisible-become-visible (Carrasco 1990: 50).[5] The term that Matta often used to denote this essence was "inscape," the title not only of a 1943 painting (no. 11) but also of other Matta works as well. The term was coined by the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who defined inscape as "the 'individually distinctive' inner structure or nature of a thing; hence, the essence of a natural object, which, being perceived through the moment of illumination—an epiphany—reveals the unity of all creation" (Mitchell). Hopkins's theory of inscape suggests that "every object has an essence that can be perceived; this essence points to God's design of it and the unified design of the creation" (Mitchell). "*Inscape*," wrote Hopkins, "is what I above all aim at in poetry" (240). It is certainly what Matta aimed at in his art.

To talk of inscape and essence, as Hopkins and Matta do, is to posit the existence of an otherness that is both real and knowable. Yet, because that essence can never be simply reduced to the sensorial or empirical, it can never be completely comprehended (as one might comprehend a mathematical theorem). To categorize Matta as a sacramental realist is thus to place him between the naïve realist, who assumes that reality can be known simply by "taking a good look," and the subjectivist, who presumes that all "reality" is merely a psychological construct that lacks any objectivity. Sacramental realism posits the existence of the real as both visible and invisible, both matter and spirit. Knowledge is acquired not only through observation but also through experiential *encounter* with the invisible-become-visible. The invisible God becomes visible precisely out of love, out of a desire for encounter with that which is not-God. Indeed, that desire compels the divine to *become* the human, the worldly. The artist's daunting task is to re-present the Incarnation, i.e., to "make present again" God's desire for encounter as this desire is made visible in the world. The Other's passionate desire for encounter is the inscape, the essence of all things. Inscape is epiphany.

Matta's art expresses the intimate connection between the invisible and the visible, the transparent and the image, not as an abstraction but as a dynamic intrinsic to life itself. The image is but the result of the very dynamism of Mystery, the Other; the essence of life *is* expression, self-communication, self-revelation. Thus, there is an intrinsic, organic connection between the invisible and the visible inasmuch as the former *must* become the latter, and the latter is the expression of the former. The spiritual must become the material, must express itself as material. In this "must" lies the passion that throbs so seductively in Matta's art, which he himself defines as the "desire for that which does not exist" (Carrasco 1990: 56). And in this "must" lies the union of eros and *agape* that defines his art. Love of the Other (the visible, the image, the material) is but the *desire* to become the Other. Quoting the medieval Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart, Matta thus avers that "the same eye with which you look at God is the eye with which God looks at you" (Carrasco 1990: 61).

Eduardo Carrasco underlines the fundamentally theological character of Matta's realism, suggesting that it was precisely Matta's increasing interest in representing the essence of the real that has made so much of his work countercultural:

> In our age, marked by an absence of myth and belief, in this time without any doctrine capable of providing cultural unity, this subjectivist characteristic appears as extremely dangerous and contrary to the phenomenological essence of art (the epiphany of the true). Art will be reduced to pure exteriorization and its origin would be simply the need for expression characteristic of every human being; it would have no other intent than that of demonstrating the interior life of the subject who creates it. This cannot be any further from the primary task of art, whose object is rather the opposite, the epiphany of the divine, the true or the absolute, insofar as this can appear to human eyes (1990: 26).

In the subjectivist culture of the art world, Matta's most countercultural—and hence least marketable—work was not his most "abstract" work but the more representational pieces. Indeed, the fact that the works from the post-New York period are so often dismissed by the *cognoscenti* would seem to confirm Carrasco's observation that the marketplace is dominated by an anti-realist subjectivism that places the Artist at center stage. Matta himself noted and lamented this fact: "I could have settled down to make the paintings which I made in the United States, which are the only ones that have a price, though now

there are none. They all presume that what I paint now is of no interest...that is to say, the market" (Carrasco 1987: 65).

Moreover, there is a direct connection between Matta's growing interest in representation and his interest in retrieving his Latin American roots.[6] Matta's works from the last two decades of his life, for instance, often express a deeply spiritual vision influenced not only by Christian symbols but also by mythological and indigenous, pre-Columbian symbols as well. To either dismiss or depreciate his works from this period is, *de facto*, to dismiss or ignore both the religious character of his artistic vision and its Latin American roots. In his later years he returned with special vigor to both of these aspects of his early life. One must wonder, then, whether the relative lack of interest in these later works is the result of purely artistic judgments or, as Eduardo Carrasco suggests above, the modern Western intelligentsia's instinctive prejudice against all things religious and, one might add, Latin American (read non-European).

The spiritual dimension of Matta's work distinguishes it from both the European Surrealists and the North American Abstract Expressionists from whom he was ultimately estranged. Not coincidentally, so too did his Latin American Catholic roots make him an exception (together with Wifredo Lam). That spirituality—which, *qua* Latin American, incorporates indigenous, mythological, pre-Columbian elements as well—makes Matta a countercultural anomaly in the worlds of Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. Matta cannot ascribe to a surrealism that degenerates into the anti-realism of Magritte's *La trahison des images ('Ceci n'est pas une pipe')*. Matta is not content with the statement, "This is not a pipe"; he goes on to ask, "Then what is it?"

Matta's sacramental realism, the dynamic between invisibility and visibility, is further intensified as it encounters the inevitable obstacles, necrophilic forces that resist the inner dynamic of the Other toward self-expression. The tension thus created between life, which demands expression, and death, which resists it, is powerfully conveyed, for instance, in *A Grave Situation* (1946, no. 19) and *The Unthinkable* (1957, no. 33). Here, Matta depicts the struggle between ex-pression and de-pression, the struggle between *the* Other (the invisible) that demands to become *an* other (the visible) and the mechanized, impersonal forces that would resist, or "box in" this dynamic. In the struggle is life itself.

And the source of death lies precisely in the attempt to maintain the visible and the invisible separate and mutually isolated. Matta describes that separation as a "mutation" and a "bad conception of the incomprehensible" (Smith and Dartnell 22). Indeed, he identifies this dichotomy as the source of a certain kind of spurious Christian spirituality, one that is "ignorant of love" (Smith and Dartnell 22). The result of such a spirituality is the victory of the idol—"a hieratic, imposing, and frightening form"—over the life-giving God encountered in the very struggle for expression. In *Children's Fear of Idols* (1943, no. 10), the cold, lifeless geometric shapes which, in *A Grave Situation*, are being struggled against, appear in the foreground as dominating figures in an otherwise dark, lifeless environment. The tension and struggle so palpable in *The Unthinkable* are here absent. There is little difference, then, between the technological idols that quash life and the "imposing, frightening" God which children are so often taught to fear; such a "God" can only be an idol, a false god.

In the 1930s and 40s, the false gods of Matta's childhood reemerged with the traumatic, violent death of his close friend, the great Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca and also with the devastation wrought by Hitler's armies and concentration camps. Matta's friend Gordon Onslow Ford has observed how the Chilean artist's Catholic upbringing continued to influence his artistic vision: "Matta during his Jesuitical training had been burdened with the fear of judgement day. He once said to me that the object of life was to prepare oneself [for] death" (Fletcher 239). This fear could only have been heightened by Lorca's assassination in 1936. The personal devastation that Matta experienced in the wake of Lorca's assassination is movingly depicted in the 1938 work, *Both of You* (no. 3). In this harrowing scene of destruction, the Crucified hangs at the center of a bereaved creation. Jesus may be "the Way," but that Way now appears closed to us: the door is shut and the ruptured tracks lead nowhere. (The Crucifixion was a recurring theme in Matta's work throughout his life.)[7]

If in *Children's Fear of Idols* the dynamic of life is paralyzed by the fear of the terrifying idol, in *Nada* (see fig. 2, p. 34) that dynamic is broken up, fragmented and thereby stilled. The endlessly changing, moving, pulsating, metamorphosing forms of life are here but broken flower petals laid against

the grey, dark background. This scene bespeaks not the life of the flower, but the lifelessness of the petal. This is death through fragmentation, rupture, separation. Given Matta's own distrust of spiritualities "ignorant of love," it is not surprising that he has entitled this work *Nada*, a term most identified with the spirituality of St. John of the Cross. Matta explicitly counted John of the Cross among those mystics who subscribed to a "mutant" worldview, separating the material and the spiritual (even if many other interpreters of the Spanish mystic have thought otherwise) (Smith and Dartnell 22). Yet *Nada* also speaks to the sense of devastation wrought by World War II, which had a direct impact on Matta's work in this period.

Much later, Matta's most mature works reveal a man who has come to terms with death, who is able to laugh—or at least smile—in the face of death. By the time of the 1982 paintings, *Art-Cadia* and *The Sign* (nos. 49 and 51), Matta was able to imagine and represent a world without idols, a world where the struggles and tensions of *A Grave Situation* and *The Unthinkable* could yield an authentic liberation, where the material and spiritual, the visible and invisible, the secular and the sacred, the erotic and the agapic would no longer be at odds with each other. Matta had progressed from the despair of *Both of You* and *Children's Fear of Idols*, to the dramatic tension of *A Grave Situation* and *The Unthinkable*, to the final peaceful, joyous resolution of *Art-Cadia* and *The Sign*.

Like the Eucharistic host/ovum in *Art-Cadia*, *The Sign* to which the totemic figures bow, before which they prostrate themselves, is precisely the circular band that testifies to the union of opposites, the marriage of what had formerly been separate. The translucent yellows and blues of these idyllic scenes evoke the biblical fire and water of rebirth, of paradise regained. Here the throbbing, pulsating earthiness of earlier works is replaced by a pellucid lightness at once profoundly spiritual and playful. One can sense in these paintings an almost mystical wonder, that capacity for sheer delight that comes only after years of struggle—and that is the foundation of all true worship. In *Both of You*, the outstretched arms and upward glance are poignant expressions of a profound anguish, even despair (prayer as pleading). Forty-five years later, in *Art-Cadia*, these same gestures are transformed into expressions of ecstatic wonder and worship (prayer as praise). In *Art-Cadia* and *The Sign*, Matta presents his own mystical vision, where the "fear of judgement day" that permeated some of his earlier works has apparently been vanquished. In his homage to Matta, Eduardo Carrasco observes that: "all true art always becomes again a natural mysticism...which seems to contradict all humanism. What happens is that, at bottom, the human being can only be properly situated in the cosmos when nature itself is revealed in its magnificence" (1990: 61). Only then can we look at God as God looks at us.

Notes

1 Indeed, as Blaise Pascal so accurately observed, the temptation to flee our visible, corporeal selves into the world of an invisible, angelic existence—thereby identifying ourselves with the seeming "purity" of the transcendent—has historically been the source and cause of the most beastly acts of inhumanity.

2 Rather than a "melting pot," Latin American cultures are more like a stew or salad, where the particular elements retain their taste while contributing to the evolving taste of the whole dish. For philosophical/literary analyses of Latin American mestizaje see the classic work of Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959) and that of José Vasconcelos, esp. *La Raza Cósmica* and *El monismo estético*, in Vasconcelos, *Obras completas*, 4 Vols (México: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1958–1961).

3 For the text of this poem, see Goizueta, "The Artist as Poet," pp. 15–28.

4 The work's title alludes to the ancient Mesopotamian city of Accad, in turn reflecting Matta's later preoccupation with religious imagery and mythology.

5 For a classic exposition of the Catholic understanding of symbolic, or sacramental realism, see Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966).

6 See Goizueta, "The Artist as Poet," pp. 15–28.

7 See, e.g., *Study for Crucifixhim* (1946), *Crucifixhim* (1947), *Christo delle Mosche* (1958), *Composition* (1965), *L'alto, il basso, la sinistra, la destra del cuore* (1971).

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Mindscapes and Mind Games: Visualizing Thought in the Work of Matta and his Abstract Expressionist Contemporaries

Claude Cernuschi

The broin—is wider thon the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contoin
With eose—ond You—beside—

The broin is deeper thomn the seo—
For—hold them—Blue to Blue—
The one the other will obsorb—
As sponges—buckets—do—

Emily Dickinson

Matta and the Modern Tradition

While Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, and adjunct professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, William Rubin frequently opened graduate art history seminars by contrasting Edouard Manet's *The Fifer* of 1866 (fig. 1) with Roberto Matta's *Vertigo of Eros* of 1944 (fig. 2) and asking his rather bemused and perplexed students: "which of these two paintings is the most abstract?" As if the question were not confusing (and the situation not intimidating) enough, Rubin broke his students' long silence by adding that, although he felt confident in his ability to predict the answer most readily volunteered by the proverbial "person in the street," he was more interested in the answers provided by the students in the seminar. Rubin's query, of course, was a trick question. If the average spectator would readily and, to Rubin's mind, unthinkingly designate the Matta as the more abstract of the two, he believed it was incumbent upon a more sophisticated art history graduate student to articulate a different view. Specifically, that Manet undermined any potential sensation of depth by placing his figure before a flat, indiscriminate field, while Matta, conversely, composed his medley of abstract shapes in such a way as to evoke a surprisingly vivid illusion of three-dimensional space. So regularly and predictably did Matta's forms recede, Rubin insisted, that a Renaissance master employing the rules of linear perspective could hardly have done better. No less significant, the layers and over-layers, rubbings and over-rubbings typical of Matta's technique betrayed such subtle gradations of light and dark as to convey, according to Rubin, a strikingly palpable "illusion of atmospheric space" (1968: 348).

The point Rubin wished to inculcate firmly upon his students, therefore, was that, in spite of his abstract formal language, Matta was, at bottom, simply emulating (and consequently no more radical than) Leonardo, Perugino, or Raphael. In his extensive history of the Dada and Surrealist movements, Rubin reiterated this idea with marked emphasis. Matta's work, he wrote, adheres "uncompromisingly to a very deep—in fact, infinite—illusion of space that is in some ways like that of the old masters" (1968: 348). And since its obstinate fidelity to linear and aerial perspective contravened "the main tendency of modern painting, which has been towards greater flatness (that is, anti-illusionism) regardless of the degree of figuration," Rubin felt he had no other choice but to denigrate Matta's work as "old fashioned" (1968: 350). Even Manet's *Fifer*—in spite of portraying a recognizable subject—posed a more radical challenge to the ossified pictorial conventions of Renaissance perspective than Matta's *Vertigo*. By placing his figure before a void, and by stressing—even flaunting—the literal flatness of the picture plane, Manet forfeited the directive imposed upon Western artists since Classical Antiquity and the time of Giotto (i.e., to create a persuasive illusion of three-dimensional space); as a result, he defiantly paved the way for the most important artistic contribution of twentieth-century art: pure abstraction.

Fig. 1
Edouard Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866, oil on canvas, 161 x 97 in. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

In Rubin's universe, a reactionary and *retardataire* painting such as *Vertigo* could hardly compete with the forward-looking *Fifer*. Intriguingly, Rubin had first held Matta in high esteem (Rubin 1957), but, after fully converting to the ideas of his intellectual mentor, the American art critic Clement Greenberg, he ostracized Matta from the grand scheme of modern art's heroic development. Along with the Englishman Roger Fry, Greenberg earned considerable authority by elevating the concept of purity above all aesthetic concerns. On his account, the pressures of modernity were so intense as to place artists in an especially dire predicament. Commodity capitalism and oppressive political governments usurped the communicative powers of art to such a nefarious degree that, lest artists delimit an exclusive domain particular to their own craft, their work would invariably degenerate into kitsch, popular entertainment, or, worse, political propaganda. Only under the slogan of "art for art's sake," Greenberg argued, could artists manage to steer clear of crass commercialism and totalitarian manipulation. As if this mandate were not strict enough, Greenberg also encouraged all creative media to declare their full independence from, and reject any allusions to, all other creative media. To his mind, painting could not illustrate historical events, literary narratives, or biblical scenes without encroaching upon the domains of history, literature, and religion. Nor could painting suggest illusions of the third dimension without encroaching upon another medium whose very literal existence was intrinsically three-dimensional: sculpture. Greenberg thus decreed that painters should seek purity by emphasizing only those properties exclusive to their own craft; and the only property that met this requirement—i.e., the only property that painting embodied and shared with no other artistic idiom—was the literal flatness of the picture plane. To achieve the ideal state of aesthetic independence Greenberg so ardently sought, painters had no other choice than to relinquish the age-old responsibility of reproducing the world illusionistically, and foreground the literal flatness of the surface upon which they worked.

It is this very directive, arguably, that explains Greenberg and Rubin's later reserve toward Surrealism in general and towards Matta in particular. Indeed, Greenberg disapproved of Surrealism because of its literary pretensions; and, need it be said, the movement's key inspirational source was Freudian psychoanalysis, a discipline whose interpretive precepts were indifferent to, and whose claims to scientific status lay outside of, the domain of pure aesthetics. Most psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically inclined critics, after all, ignored formal issues and pounced upon works of art as a pretext to explore the psyche of their creator. For André Breton, in fact, the intellectual founder and driving force behind Surrealism, the very object of the movement was to invent aesthetic techniques that would allow art to approximate, if not reveal,

"the real functioning of the mind" (Breton 37). Since Matta was expelled from the movement in 1948, he may have had problems adhering strictly to Surrealist doctrine, as well as negotiating the minefield of the group's political intrigues, but he could legitimately be seen as conforming staunchly to its basic premises. In spite of the political wrangling that eventually cut him off from his colleagues, Matta still described the purpose of his art as inventing a "language that can allow us to see changes in human relations, in human history, in the human mind" (Arts Council 1977: 11). At the crux of his activity as an artist, Matta also insisted, was to "picture mentalities" (Miller 16). Personal and ideological conflicts with Surrealism notwithstanding, Matta probably felt he had implemented its ideals far more faithfully than did many of its key members.

It was these very ambitions, however, that drew the ire of critics like Greenberg and Rubin. Leaving aside the delicate issue of whether the Surrealists actually attained their goal of accessing the "real functioning of the mind" (either by illustrating the visual and spatial incongruities typical of dreams or by allowing their hands to move across the canvas with little premeditation or conscious control), their attempt to fathom human mentation invariably ran afoul of Greenberg and Rubin's insistence on the purity of modern painting. Dali's incongruous juxtapositions and illogical metamorphoses were admittedly new, but his illusionistic renderings of three-dimensional space prompted Greenberg to assert, somewhat unfairly, that he and his colleagues had instigated "no fundamental change in the conventions of painting as established by the Renaissance" (Greenberg 1: 230). Predictably, Greenberg summarily dismissed Matta as the "prince of comic-strippers" and the creator of "illegitimate sculpture" (Greenberg 2: 13, 318n). Rubin was less severe, to be sure, but for him as well, Surrealism's literary concerns and psychological pretensions proved an unwelcome distraction from the primary quest toward artistic purity instigated by Manet and later fulfilled in twentieth-century abstraction.

Unlike Greenberg, however, Rubin recognized how critical the illusion of three dimensions was to Matta's subject matter.

Fig. 2
Roberto Matta, *The Vertigo of Eros*, 1944, oil on canvas, 77 x 99 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, given anonymously. Digital Image (c) 2003 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Especially suggestive, he admitted, was Matta's ability to evoke "an infinitely deep space that suggests simultaneously the cosmos and the recesses of the mind" (Rubin 2002: 34). If only on this point, Rubin hit the nail right on the head; Matta, after all, had declared his own intentions unambiguously: "Everything urged me to believe," he professed, "that I should apply myself to displaying the world I carried within me...the subconscious in its burning liquid state...[my works are] exercises of individual poetry related to desires sometimes unknown" (Ferrari 1987: 217). Persuasively identifying Matta's subject matter, however, did not sway Rubin from returning a negative verdict. Proclaiming *Vertigo of Eros* to represent "the last major statement of the possibilities of *peinture-poésie* to have emerged from the Surrealist movement before its dissolution in the later forties" (2002: 33), Rubin betrays the force of his Greenbergian prejudices well enough. First, his use of the very term, *peinture-poésie* (poetical-painting), impugns *Vertigo*'s hybrid, inter-disciplinary character; and, second, branding the painting as the genre's "last major statement" bespeaks how meager Rubin thought the genre's potential prospects were, especially when compared to the more promising possibilities of purist abstraction. Rubin thus denigrated *Vertigo* as an aesthetic dead-end, and Matta

for staking a position "directly opposed to the premises of the various vanguard styles that have held the field since Surrealism dissolved" (2002: 33).

This statement has significant implications. Having claimed Matta's "influence in terms of painterly values and techniques" to have "been considerable" in 1957 (qtd. in Ferrari 1987: 244), after converting fully to Greenbergian aesthetics, Rubin intimated that the dramatic development of American Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s and 1950s occurred independently of Matta's influence. To be sure, Matta was an intimate of such important artists as Arshile Gorky, William Baziotes, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock; and his pseudo-abstract style, his automatic execution, and his loosening of the rigid impositions of the cubist grid, appealed to the avant-garde artists of the New York School. But Rubin now insisted that Matta's employment of "perspective orthogonals," his suggestions of an "illusionistic, often very deep, space," and his hybridist mixture of painting and poetry, proved fundamentally incompatible with Abstract Expressionism (2002: 36). The young American artists, Rubin contends, "did not understand" painting in Matta's "more particularized psychological and poetic terms" (2002: 36). Matta's work, he invariably concludes, was moving "in the opposite direction from New York painting. In fact, it had always been opposed in its goals" (2002: 33).

On Rubin's account, everything Matta stood for—i.e., mixtures of painting and poetry, and evocations of three-dimensional space—signaled nothing less than a significant detour from the incremental drive toward flatness and pure form that he and Greenberg were prescribing for modern painting. Although this particular ideological bent explains Rubin's blatant attempt to underestimate the extent of Matta's influence on American art, his version of events also triggered remarkable resistance from some quarters—even sending the likes of Octavio Paz into a rage. Intriguingly, Paz refrained from directly contradicting Greenberg and Rubin's conceptual reasons for relegating Matta to the historical sidelines; in fact, by readily acknowledging Matta's adherence to "narrative painting, painting that tells a story" (25), Paz conceded part of their argument. But he did not share their ideological loyalties, and, as a result, he had no reason to construe literary allusions as inimical to the overall project of modern painting. Mentioning neither Greenberg nor Rubin, although obviously having their views in mind, Paz counterattacked by claiming that ignoring or minimizing Matta's "influence, as has on occasion been attempted, is, in addition to being nonsense, scandalous" (24).

With all due respect to Paz, and without discounting Matta's historical importance, it must be said that Rubin's argument about Matta's divergence from New York School abstraction—its Greenbergian bias notwithstanding—still holds considerable authority. It is widely reported in the art historical literature, after all, that the young Abstract Expressionists harbored a strong opposition to illusionistic space. In their famous 1943 letter to the *New York Times*, for instance, Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman declared: "We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth" (Gottlieb and Rothko 9). And although Motherwell expressed great admiration for Matta's drawings, he disapproved of the paintings for being "too illusionistic" (Terenzio 160). These tirades may not, by themselves, warrant Matta's dismissal from the ranks of those artists pivotal to the development of American abstraction; but it is also crucial to mention that Matta himself remembered a deepening divide separating him from the young artists of the New York School. "It is often said that I greatly influenced American artists," Matta told Paul Haim, "Absolutely false! We never understood each other. The only thing they grasped was the freedom of the gesture" (Haim 47).

Most of Matta's supporters (Paz, especially) no doubt wished he had not uttered these words. Not only do they marginalize his own position in the New York art world, but they also vindicate, however unwittingly, the most dogmatic of Rubin's contentions. Yet Matta's avowal begs the question as to whether there was another critical issue that divided his work from American Abstract Expressionism, an issue that Rubin and Greenberg, given their strictly formalist approach, overlooked completely. After all, could the ideological disagreement between Matta and the Abstract Expressionists have truly revolved exclusively around the evocation of three-dimensional space? Or was there something else, something more fundamental that distanced Matta from the younger generation of American painters? Admittedly, as the comments cited above reveal, the Abstract Expressionists did reject spatial illusionism; but

they never did so with the uncompromising insistence betrayed by either Rubin or Greenberg. Elaine de Kooning, for instance, expressed the view that in art, "flatness is just as much an illusion as three-dimensional space. Anyone who says 'the painting is flat' is saying the least interesting and least true thing about it" (29). For his part, Matta ascribed the divergences between him and the young Americans to different issues. Although he demanded that a "new morphology was required," he recalled that "no one could, nor would, listen to me.... As for me, it is the cosmos that I wanted!" (Haim 53). From the implications of this statement alone, one can make the case that questions of pictorial space, though hardly insignificant, were not necessarily the most pressing on the artists' minds. As a result, this essay will be devoted to the alternative proposition that it was around questions of meaning (and how meaning was to be represented), not around questions of space, that the ideological disagreements between Matta and the Americans revolved. As Matta himself put it: "The Americans did not understand what I meant by conception, they only wanted to manipulate color" (Haim 52).

Yet Matta's statement gives something else away. If he thought the Abstract Expressionists misunderstood his demands for a "new morphology," his opinion must be given credence, if only because he, after all, stands in a good position to judge any misinterpretation of his views. But his other claim—that the artists of the New York School simply "wanted to manipulate color" and apply gestures with greater freedom—seriously misrepresents their own position. Contrary to Greenbergian dogma, the Abstract Expressionists were hostile to formalist interpretations, and frequently insisted that, in spite of being non-representational, their works were meant to express emotive states and communicate philosophical ideas. As Clyfford Still put it: "I never wanted color to be color. I never wanted texture to be texture, or images to become shapes. I wanted them all to fuse into a living spirit" (Kuh 10). Motherwell expressed a similar view when he professed that the

> ...pure red of which certain abstractionists speak does not exist, no matter how one shifts its physical contexts. Any red is rooted in blood, glass, wine, hunter's caps, and a thousand other concrete phenomena. Otherwise we should have no feeling towards red or its relations, and it would be useless as an artistic element (Terenzio 38).

For Barnett Newman, moreover,

> ...the new painter feels that abstract art is not something to love for itself, but is a language to be used to project important visual ideas. In this way, abstract art can become personal, charged with emotion and capable of giving shape to the highest human insights, instead of creating plastic objects, objective shapes which can be contemplated only for themselves... (141).

On this basis, one could argue that the misunderstanding between Matta and the Americans was, in fact, mutual; and, further, that at stake in their disagreement were fundamental issues of meaning (i.e., issues more interpretively significant than the formal evocation of three-dimensional space). With hindsight, of course, these misunderstandings and disagreements may seem largely inconsequential, or simply run-of-the-mill wrangling among aesthetic rivals. But even if subtle and nuanced, the conceptual distinctions that triggered the rift between Matta and the Abstract Expressionists may help sharpen, as this essay shall endeavor to do, our understanding of the work and motivations of both.

Matta and the Mind-as-Architecture Metaphor

This task is arduous, however, because, divergences on spatial issues aside, Matta and the young Americans actually shared a number of key iconographical interests in common. Even Rubin's Greenbergian prejudices did not prevent him from recognizing that Matta's introduction of deep space allowed his work to suggest "a kind of electrical system of the mind," a realm where "perspective devices project spatial metaphors for the tensions, ambiguities, contradictions and frustrations of psychic reality" (2002: 36). Since Matta tirelessly stressed his work's "psychological" dimension, he would have been highly gratified by this aspect of Rubin's reading. His main preoccupation, he confessed, was "to see within one's self" (qtd. in Ferrari 1987: 246). But if Matta conceived of his work as a form of psychological introspection, the young American painters took to this concept like ducks to water. "Matta's idea," according to the painter Peter Busa, "was that we have a rich world

within and don't have to look for it outside ourselves" (Simon 19). Compare that to Adolph Gottlieb's view that "...the external world as far as I was concerned had been totally explored in painting and there was a whole ripe new area in the inner world that we all have.... I was trying to focus on what I experienced within my mind, within my feelings rather than on the external world which I can see" (Ross 57). Or to Mark Rothko's claim that his works provided a "pictorial equivalent for man's new knowledge and consciousness of his more complex inner self" (2). On this account, not only did the Abstract Expressionists' concerns extend beyond mere formal matters, but their thematic interests also coincided perfectly with Matta's. Just as Jackson Pollock believed that the modern artist "is working and expressing an inner world...the energy, the motion, and other inner forces" (O'Connor 4: 250), or Motherwell that "one of the tasks of modern art set for itself was to find a language that would be closer to the structure of the human mind" (Buck 25), Matta likewise saw his art as reflecting "a deep wish to measure what can be felt. How to picture the battlefield, not the physical one, but the one inside us: fear against courage, criticism and hate, suspicion and trust?" (Ferrari 1987: 226).

If these citations allow the intersections between Matta's thematic preoccupations and those of the Abstract Expressionists to emerge in sharper relief, they also raise another pressing question: namely, how a concept as difficult and abstract as "the mind" could even be depicted pictorially? It is one thing, of course, to *proclaim* that art can represent one's feelings, or the self, or the structure of the mind; but to actually depict these same concerns on a literal canvas is quite another. Since "feelings," "the self," or "the mind" do not, for all intents and purposes, qualify as material objects endowed with physical form and spatial extension, their alleged portrayal on canvas could only be achieved indirectly—achieved, in other words, by means of analogy or metaphor. For Matta, the answer to this dilemma was supplied, as it was for most artists of the Surrealist persuasion, by the ideas of Sigmund Freud. Freud, in fact, had often described the mind in spatial terms, and conceived of the therapeutic process of psychoanalysis as a "clearing away" of "the pathogenic psychical material layer by layer, and we liked to compare it with the technique of excavating a buried city.... [After] getting the patient to tell me what was known to her [I] would penetrate into deeper layers of her memories" (Breuer and Freud 139). In "Constructions in Analysis," moreover, Freud suggestively compared the analyst's task to "an archaeologist's excavation of some dwelling-place that has been destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice. The processes are in fact identical" (259). Freud's appropriation of archaeology as a metaphorical way of describing psychoanalysis not only proved discursively effective in describing his therapeutic process, but it also relied upon (as well as reinforced) a pre-established tendency to draw analogies between the human mind and architectural structures. The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, for example, had already employed a similar analogy in *The Sickness Unto Death*, where he forcibly compared changes in the human condition to the progressive elevations of a domestic dwelling. "In case one were to think of a house," Kierkegaard writes, "consisting of cellar, ground-floor and *premier étage*, so tenanted, or rather so arranged, that it was planned for a distinction of rank between the dwellers on the several floors; and in case one were to make a comparison between such a house and what it is to be a man—then unfortunately this is the sorry and ludicrous condition of the majority of men, that in their own house they prefer to live in the cellar" (176).

As most members of the Surrealist movement, Matta was well-versed in Freudian theory, but he was also exposed to Kierkegaard's ideas through his friend Lionel Abel, with whom he published the short-lived broadside *Instead* in eight numbers from 1947 to 1948 (Sawin 1997: 409). Abel admired Kierkegaard fervently and continuously cited passages from his texts (Golan 40). Exposure to Freud and Kierkegaard proved especially timely because their idea of comparing the mind to an architectural structure (whose differing strata designate discrete emotional layers or levels of consciousness open to "excavation") suggested a visually—and rhetorically—effective way of conceptualizing an immaterial concept such as human mentation. For Matta, this was remarkably fortuitous because he had himself undergone architectural training in his native Santiago before working under Le Corbusier in Paris from 1935 to 1937. Encountering Freud and Kierkegaard's powerful analogies thus provided Matta with the perfect way to align his technical training with the interests of the Surrealists and to establish the interpretive connections upon which much of his later work would hinge. According to Martica Sawin, "it was apparent from the start

that the psyche for [Matta] was to be visualized in architectural terms, that inner spaces as well as outer had biomorphic furnishings and could be dealt with via exploded isometric drawings" (1985: 33). To reinforce this analogy on a visual level, Matta employed such indispensable staples of architectural drawing as grids and receding orthogonals (see *Children's Fear of Idols*, *Untitled* 1944, and both *Untitled* 1945; nos. 10, 14, 17, and 18). And to reinforce it on an iconographical level, he gave his works appropriately evocative titles (e.g., *Psychological Architecture* of 1940–41), referred to his work as "emotional architecture," and even professed that painting "has one foot in architecture, one foot in the dream" (Matta 12).

It must be conceded, of course, that the uneasy conjunction of architecture and dream imagery was based on an interpretive leap. In fact, Matta's Surrealist colleagues, though no less intent upon tapping the irrational and the poetic than Matta himself, harbored highly negative predispositions towards the practical limitations of architecture, and even singled out Matta's employer, Le Corbusier, for special contempt. Determined to dispel their suspicions, Matta won the Surrealists' approval by employing metaphorical projections comparable to those used by Freud and Kierkegaard. Capitalizing on the connotations implicit in the phrase "emotional architecture"—namely, that mental space equals architectural space—Matta not only emulated the Surrealists, but he also gained their confidence by exploiting their love of paradox. After all, given the inescapable functional constraints under which architecture operates, its very ability to convey emotional states may seem tenuous at best. But Freud's and Kierkegaard's powerful analogies betray how frequently we project, albeit metaphorically, emotive meanings upon architectural structures, projections that are themselves possible because we tend to construe the very *physical* configurations of architectural spaces in terms of how we experience them on an *emotional* or *psychological* level. Attaching a whole slew of emotive associations to architectural space, we call buildings "grand," "expansive," "noble," or "dark," "contained," "confined," and "claustrophobic."

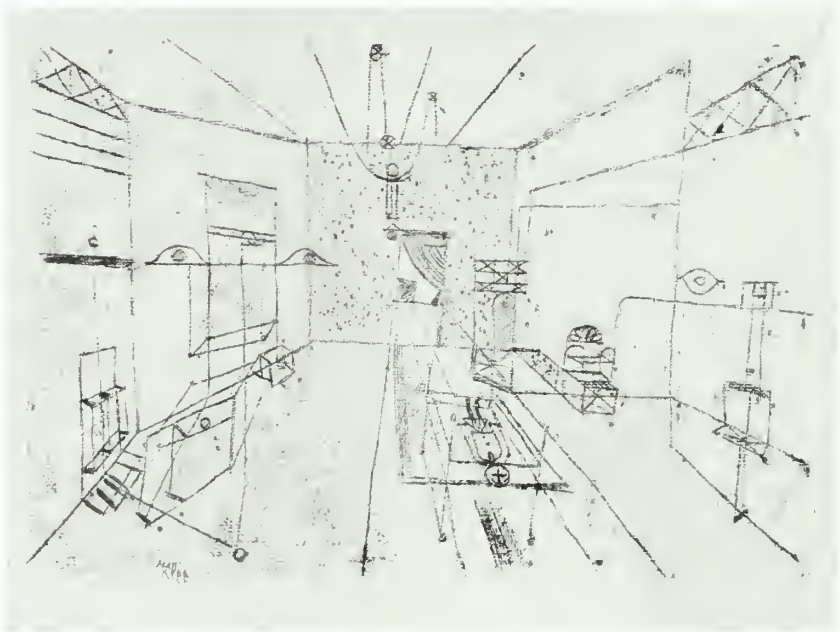

Fig. 3
Paul Klee, *Phantom Perspective*, 1920, watercolor, 9 1/2 x 12 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Berggruen Klee Collection.

On this point, it is instructive to relate that contemporary cognitive psychologists have argued that human beings have a strong proclivity to express subjective *mental* states—metaphorically—in terms of more objective *physical* states (See Johnson). For example, whenever we employ common expressions such as "I feel as though I am in a corner," "there's a ceiling on advancement in this firm," or "I keep hitting my head against the wall," we are expressing *emotions* of indecision, powerlessness, or frustration in terms of how we relate *physically* to architectural space. And since the very physical layout of architectural structures (with corners, walls, and ceilings) can curtail our potential for bodily movement, they naturally elicit sensations of limitation and constraint. These physical sensations, in turn, provide the basis for what we then construe as *appropriate* analogies—or metaphors—for emotional, psychological, intellectual, or even professional constraint. The analogies are "appropriate" because, in all the collo-

quial expressions cited above, although the relationship between the physical activity described and the emotional content expressed is metaphorical rather than literal, the relationship is not arbitrary. After all, we use an expression such as "I kept hitting my head against a wall" to describe feelings of anger and frustration, not feelings of contentment or satisfaction, which, of course, we would convey by means of other—but no less "appropriate"—metaphors (e.g., "I have finally got my foot in the door," or "A window of opportunity is opening for me," etc.). All of which is relevant to Matta's construction of meaning because, if the physical sensations we associate with moving through architectural spaces can readily be understood in emotional or psychological terms, then, *mutatis mutandis*, emotional or psychological states can also be understood, metaphorically, in terms of moving through an architectural space. Freud and Kierkegaard's analogies work in precisely this way; and, like the other common, everyday metaphors already mentioned, they employ a literal, physical situation (e.g., moving inside a building) to convey a non-literal situation (i.e., exploring the more nebulous realm of psychology, consciousness, and emotion). When Matta wielded terms such as "the mind's space" (Ferrari 1987: 223), or expressed his desire to create "a space of feeling" (Matta 12), he was, arguably, engaging in exactly the same tendency.

And he was not alone. Even modernist artists whose own proclivities were ostensibly opposed to Matta's—i.e., painters readily acknowledged by Greenberg and Rubin to have conformed to a purist agenda—often flirted with the associative connections and metaphorical projections described above. Paul Klee's *Phantom Perspective* (fig. 3), Mark Rothko's *Subway* (fig. 4), and Louise Bourgeois's *Femme Maison* (fig. 5), just to name a few, exploit either the metaphorical analogy between the mind and an architectonic structure, or the emotive connotations associated with being contained within the confines of a restrictive space. As a result, the question remains open as to whether Matta's evocation of three-dimensionality and his intermixture of painting and poetry were as antithetical to the development of modernism as Rubin's view stipulates. Revealingly, Adolph Gottlieb's *Pictographs* (fig. 6), although they avoid any hint of perspectival recession in favor of a flatter, modernist grid, are predicated upon identical associations: "I am like a man with a large family," Gottlieb stated, "and must have many rooms. The children of my imagination occupy the various compartments of my painting, each independent and occupying its own space. One can say that my paintings are like a house, in which each occupant has a room of his own" (Hirsh 42). Gottlieb's description, in fact, sounds remarkably close to Matta's own view that "An individual is a labyrinth; he is his own labyrinth and he either gets lost in his labyrinth or he meets and understands the minotaur, which in the end is his own self" (Arts Council 1977: 39–40). Given this set of associations, architecture afforded Matta with the perfect opportunity to exploit what, at first glance, appears to be a blatant incongruity between meaning and form: namely, employing the rigorous discipline of architectural drafting to convey the Surrealist fascination with the unconscious and the irrational. "The challenge of modern art," Matta was fond of saying, was to recognize "the charge of emotion and knowledge that a human being is" so that "a new image of man" could emerge; "I'm an architect," he insisted, "concerned with the building of this image" (Miller 10–11).

For the metaphor to be truly effective, however, Matta not only drew a one-to-one analogy between the mind and architecture, he also made sure the analogy evoked the sense that the human condition was perpetually plagued by inner conflict. But his employment of the architectural

Fig. 4
Mark Rothko, *Subway (Subterranean Fantasy)*, c. 1936, oil on canvas, 33 3/4 x 46 in. National Gallery of Art Washington. (c) 1996 Kate Rothko-Prizel & Christopher Rothko/Artist's Rights Society, New York.

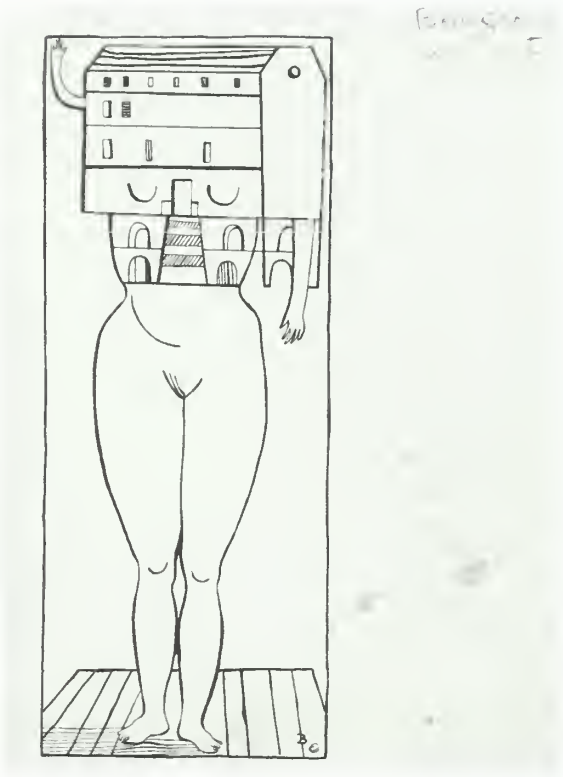

Fig. 5
Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, 1947, ink on paper, 9 5/16 x 7 1/8 in. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

metaphor fulfilled this demand so admirably that even a formalist critic such as Rubin, despite decrying Matta's illusionism as formally regressive and incompatible with modernist abstraction, could not avoid construing the physical sensations elicited by Matta's canvases in unqualifiedly metaphorical ways. Matta's space, Rubin admitted, is "fraught with pitfalls and sudden obstructions; perspective convergences pull us in opposite directions through planes whose half-dematerialized substances bend, break, or dissolve under the pressure of the movement.... Like thought, which slips into unexpected byways, drops into maelstroms, and is suddenly frustrated by blockages, Matta's concentric circles suck the eye here and there into whirlpools of space, while at other points opaque planes suddenly materialize to obstruct its passage" (1968: 350). Rubin's terminology speaks volumes. Not only does it betray just how profoundly the construction of meaning in Matta's work hinges on metaphorical projection, but also how successfully Matta persuaded critics—even those who, like Rubin, were distrustful of illusions of three-dimensional space—of his ability to create an effective approximation of mental operations. Critics like Thomas Monahan even hailed Matta as an artist "with unique insight into human consciousness.... He challenges you to...find one or many keys to unlock something about your own identity" (Carter and Monahan 9). And for Curtis Carter, Matta, analogously, "shared the anxiety of Freud and others that the appearances of the external world are not trustworthy as a source of knowledge, and first turned inward in his search for truth" (13).

The belief that Matta had approximated the complex reality and contradictory nature of human thought, however, was not a point of view that emerged, so to say, out of the blue. Implicit in the assessments quoted above is the anterior belief that Freud had discovered this reality first, and that the legitimacy of Matta's own findings somehow depend on their conformity with Freud's. Indeed, Carter's comparison of Matta to Freud, and Rubin's view that Matta's contradictory space approximates the inherent contradictions of mental space, strike us as somehow apposite, not simply because Freud conceived of psychoanalysis as a relative of archaeology, but because Freud also conceived of mental energy as a kind of fluid moving through space. Freud's writings, after all, are replete with phrases such "psychical damming-up," "sums of psychical energy," or "cathectic expenditures lifted and discharged" (1905: 118, 148). Intriguingly, these phrases are again predicated on the crucial assumption that mental events are spatial events: that mental energy is conceived as moving through the mind the way, say, a human being moves through a building; and, moreover, that, just as walls, floors, ceilings, or doors can entrap or release a human being, so is mental energy subject to channeling, damming-up, discharge, and so on. This concept, arguably, had a profound impact on Matta. By deliberately *warping* his orthogonals, he began to distort architectural form, both to silence critics who felt his suggestions of three-dimensional space looked "backward" (Kozloff 25), and to conform to Freud's view that mental energy behaved like a dynamic fluid. As a result, Matta not only steered clear of convention by undermining the rules of traditional perspective, but, by evoking the more irregular, organic realm of biology rather than the rectilinear geometry of architecture, he also aligned his work all the more closely with Freud's view of the mind.

Matta's decision was somewhat unorthodox because, as an aesthetic device, perspective proves most effective when mapping buildings (was it not a fifteenth-century architect, Filippo Brunelleschi, who invented it?). But since the mind-as-architecture metaphor proved all the more appropriate to a Freudian take on human psychology if architectonic form were warped and bent, Matta's formal liberties quickly earned the endorsement of the very Surrealists whose love of the irrational made them inordinately suspicious of architecture's practical limitations. In fact, they were so pleased by Matta's radical distortions of space that Breton even commissioned Matta to write a piece on architecture for their publication *Minotaure*, where Matta, only too happy to oblige, entertained the possibility that one day "walls like wet sheets...[will] get out of shape and fit our psychological fears" (Sawin 1985: 33). Relinquishing pragmatic concerns, Matta's Freudian viewpoint now allowed him to envision an "emotional architecture" whose very scoffing of the laws of gravity that constrained the erection of buildings in the past made it especially appropriate to the suggestion of human psychology. But here again, Matta's architectural training served him well; and his approach, albeit radical, was not entirely original. Art Nouveau architects such as Hector Guimard or August Endell (the very architects against whom Le Corbusier had himself reacted) had already made it a practice of decorating buildings with a profusion of curvilinear ornament, the organic nature of which obscured (if not threatened to violate) the rectilinear integrity of a building's underlying construction. Like Matta's warped lines, these structures not only skirted the strict geometry to which so much past architecture conformed, but the entwined spirals and biological flavor of much Art Nouveau decoration, often criticized for its superficial quality, also recalled the continual effervescence and germination of all organisms condemned to struggle for their survival. And just as human bodies are said to have an inside and an outside—i.e., an "inner" life and an "outward" demeanor—so were the interior of some Art Nouveau buildings thought to have a (potentially disturbing) psychological quality, as if their meandering whiplash curves somehow simulated the agitation and energy of the human nervous system.

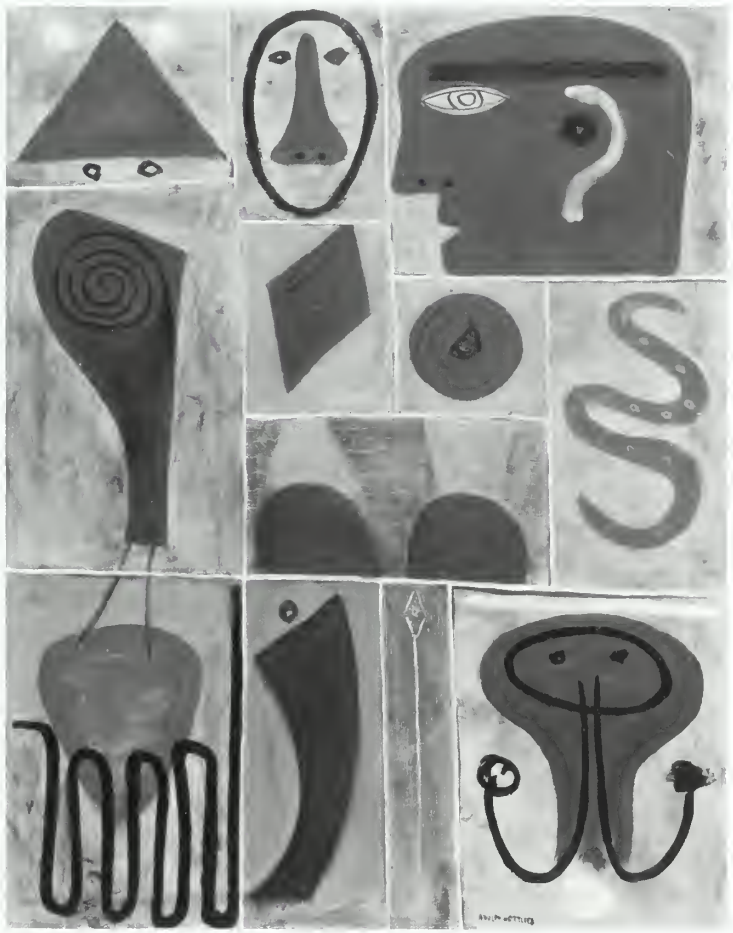

Fig. 6
Adolph Gottlieb, *Voyager's Return*, 1946, oil on canvas, 37 7/8 x 29 7/8 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. And Mrs. Roy Neuberger.

Given the striking symmetry human beings tend to construe between the physical and the psychological, it should thus hardly be surprising that, from the philosophy of Kierkegaard to the psychology of Freud, and from the work of Art Nouveau architects to the paintings of Matta, architectural spaces functioned as effective metaphors for mental states. Matta simply allowed the analogy to cut both ways: if the mind can be compared to

architectural space, then architectural space—when made to look organic and biological—can be compared to the mind. As right angles disappear and solids appear to soften, Matta's "emotional architecture"—also anticipating the irregular buildings of Frank Gehry—rejects rectilinearity in favor of evoking some kind of protean plasma capable of morphing depending on the emotional state the artist wishes to convey at the time. Intriguingly, as Matta enlisted the physical to connote the psychological, his critics saw no difficulty in taking the requisite interpretive leap. For Alvaro Medina, "Matta was inspired to see the relationship which could be established between the confined inter-uterine space, the space of an apartment or a room through which movement was possible and limitless cosmic space" (71). Matta, Medina continues, succeeded in endowing "his spaces with the organic quality of the maternal womb and vastness of the cosmos" (72). As physical space and mental space became nearly interchangeable, Matta, unwilling to restrict himself to painting perspective orthogonals, also found inspiration in irregular topographical lines as they appear concentrically on geographical or geological maps. Although highly effective in conveying elevation or depression, thus underscoring how critical the artist's use of three-dimensional space was to his way of visualizing the mind, these curvilinear lines, now unhinged from their original function, began to recall the emanation and expansion of radio or particle waves from a central point (Ferrari 1987: 227, 242).

These formal devices, and the biological and psychological associations Matta was attaching to architecture, were increasingly compelling him to forfeit any consistent or systematic mapping of space. In fact, to underscore how radically his warping and bending of orthogonals ran afoul of Renaissance perspective, Matta began to describe his space as emphatically "non-Euclidian." "I picture this non-Euclidian space," he explained, "which might be compared to the space of temperatures in a room, of meteorological space, as a container developing the event in a way similar to wave lengths and heat-paths" (Kozloff 26). This new space frustrates our spatial expectations at every turn by allowing, according to Matta, "all the ordinates and coordinates" to move "in themselves, because the references to the 'wall,' shall we say, of the space, are constantly changing. They are not parallel to a Euclidian cube, to which most previous painting has referred" (Kozloff 26). In other words, if Brunelleschian perspective suggested stability and permanence, Matta wanted his space to suggest the opposite: the turbulence of human emotions and the mutability of psychological states. "Perspective," he recognized, "wasn't good enough for this; it dealt with still things" (Miller 11). Even Rubin was forced to recognize how drastically Matta's use of space differed from its traditional incarnations: "Whereas the perspective system of old-master space is ordered by a single unified, governing idea (the perfect convergence of orthogonals in systematic focus perspective), Matta—taking a cue from de Chirico—articulates his deep space not with a single vanishing point but with multiple and frequently conflicting focuses" (1968: 350). Valerie Fletcher made an analogous observation when she wrote that Matta's linear configurations "both suggest and deny three-dimensional space.... [Matta] delighted in contradicting an area of illusionistic space with a conflicting system elsewhere in the composition" (247).

The strategy of employing multiple foci, as Rubin also recognized, was meant to reinforce Matta's general ambition to provide a visual analog for the mind's conflicts and contradictions. Describing *The Onyx of Electra* (CGP 121*), Rubin argues that Matta

> seems to deal not so much with the deep recesses of the psyche [here] as with a more intimate area, closer to the surface of the self, in which the life force is transformed into mental and nervous energy. In this 'electrical' system of the mind all the tensions, ambiguities, contradictions, and frustrations of reality are felt (1968: 350).

Rubin even cites Matta as saying: "It is the *space* created by contradictions which interests me as the best picture of our mental condition. The fault with most pictures today is that they show an a priori freedom from which they have eliminated all contradiction, all resemblance to reality" (1968: 350). Matta's ambition to translate emotional tension into the warping of space, or mental contradiction into spatial contradiction, undermined conventional perspective so powerfully as to have strongly inflected the work of Robert Motherwell, who was on intimate terms with Matta, especially when both traveled to Mexico together in 1941. Examples from Motherwell's so-called *Mexican Sketchbook* (fig. 7) betray how closely Motherwell's visual

Fig. 7
Robert Motherwell, *Mexican Sketchbook*, 1941, page three, India ink on paper, 9 x 11 1/2 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the artist. Digital Image (c) 2003 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

experiments followed Matta's, especially given how Motherwell uncomfortably juxtaposes a checkerboard pattern of receding orthogonals to a medley of amorphous and indistinct forms. If Motherwell appropriated Matta's very tactic of employing contradictory spatial clues and conflicting visual signals, this connection is mentioned here as much to contradict Rubin's claim that New York School artists were untouched by Matta's influence, as to argue that the cardinal sin of which Greenberg and Rubin accused him—i.e., of having re-invoked traditional Renaissance perspective and deep space illusionism—was basically unwarranted. Matta's space proves far more complex and contradictory than Greenberg and Rubin recognized (although Rubin did, as seen above, occasionally acknowledge this point). For Matta, after all, pictorial space could effectively reflect the concept of the conflicted mind inherited from Freud and accepted as a mainstay of Surrealist doctrine only if it managed to disorient the spectator. Having scale, distance, and the relation between foreground and background remain perpetually ambiguous, as well as making space evoke both architectural and biological properties, were among Matta's most common means of achieving this end.

Matta and the Mind-as-Landscape Metaphor

Intriguingly, as Matta's ambition to evoke the mind's contradictions led him to distort architectural form, his work began connoting landscape far more vividly than architecture. "When I grasped that I was trying to make a more poetic architecture or more architectural poetry," Matta remembered, "I got into the 'saddle' of botany" (Ferrari 1987: 217). Curvilinear rather than rectilinear, biological rather than architectonic, potentially infinitely vast and variegated, landscape was gradually displacing architecture as Matta's metaphor of choice for portraying the mind. For this endeavor, the seminal catalyst was the work of the Surrealist Yves Tanguy, whose paintings of amorphous geological and atmospheric landscapes provided both a formal precedent for Matta's visual morphology and a crucial alternative to the rigid rectilinearity of architectural grids (fig. 8). Tanguy's seemingly extra-terrestrial or submarine vistas also made nature look impermanent, transitional, and in the process of continual transformation. As ambiguity provided the keynote, identifying landscape formations as large or small, near or far, proved an impossible task. Tanguy's strategy, of course, was typical of Surrealism, a strategy applied not only to visual art but also to language (Matta himself loved to concoct oxymoronic word combinations: e.g., *Coïtgitum*, connoting both coitus and cogitation, the physical and the intellectual, or *Chaosmos*, a merger of cosmos [order] and chaos [disorder]). On a visual level, Matta also paid close attention to Tanguy's predilection for spatial conundrums. Although he left matter and scale deliberately unclear, Tanguy made his forms look tangible and three dimensional on account of the strong and distinct shadows they cast. But no sooner do we believe that the forms in the foreground rest comfortably on a solid foundation than Tanguy neutralizes this effect by blurring his horizon lines and obliterating any demarcation between earth and sky. As a result, what first looks solid then looks atmospheric, and, peering at the foreground versus the background, we are forced to negotiate a contradictory set of visual clues.

Inspired by Tanguy's precedent, Matta took this tactic to another power. Obscuring distinctions between skyline and horizon-line, and mixing color areas directly on the canvas by hand or by means of rags, Matta endowed his entire repertory of forms with permeable physical boundaries (see *Psychology of Morphology*, no. 6). Even more than Tanguy's ambiguous but tangible stalagmitic formations, Matta's shapes seldom appear clearly solid or liquid, geological or biological, planetary or atmospheric—a strategy, incidentally, that helped Matta ingratiate himself with the Surrealists even further. In fact, keeping in perpetual abeyance any strict distinctions between matter and space or between background and foreground dovetailed nicely with the transformative aspects of alchemical processes, aspects with which the Surrealists, as well as Marcel Duchamp—who exerted a great influence on Surrealism in general and on Matta in particular (see Golan)—were especially fascinated. The evocation of matter remaining in a state of permanent transformation also stemmed from Matta's interest in the science of morphology, a term the artist frequently used in connection with his own work (see fig. 1, p. 31), and which he defined as following "a form through a certain evolution. For instance, from a seed to a tree, the form is constantly changing under certain pressures until it arrives at the final form, and then disintegrates.... This notion of morphology [then] relates to how one's feelings were formed, transformed, through life" (Kozloff 23).

Predictably, interpreting the ambiguous and mutable appearance of Tanguy's geological forms through the lens of morphology segued naturally into Matta's drawing yet another analogy between the physical and the psychological. Calling Tanguy's paintings "not landscapes but being-scapes" (Miller 11), Matta applied the same terminology to, and claimed an analogous diagnostic power for, his own work: "What interested me," he confessed, "was...to use morphology about my psychic responses to life" (Kozloff 25). By means of metaphorical projection, Matta thus concocted an analogical relationship between the way morphology traces the evolution of physical forms (from, say, a seed to a tree) and the way his own works allegedly reproduced the evolution of thoughts, emotions, or states of mind: "I am trying to discover," he argued, "the morphology of psychic processes" (Ferrari 1987: 64). Sharing the Surrealists' fascination with alchemy and the transubstantiation of substances, Matta—readily brandishing expressions such as "unconscious ecology" (Ferrari 1987: 226) or "mental geology" (Ferrari 1987: 227)—now hoped his audience would take the interpretive leap necessary to project the workings of the human mind upon his own version of an evocative, protean, pseudo-natural world. And just as the mind-as-architecture metaphor

Fig. 8
Yves Tanguy, *The Furniture of Time*, 1939, oil on canvas, 46 x 35 1/4 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby Bequest, 1979. Digital Image (c) 2003 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

helped persuade critics that Matta had effectively transposed human thought into a visual image, the mind-as-landscape metaphor (relying, as powerfully as it did, on the view that thought is as mutable as burgeoning natural forms) proved no less successful. According to Alvaro Medina, Matta succeeded in intimating "the magma or primordial soup which contains all the possibilities of matter" (74). And for Breton, Matta guides "us through a corallinc vegetation representing the nervous system of the kinkajou, not inanimate in the way dissection would reveal it but living, and doubtless sympathetic to the nervous system of man in terms of the possible relationships that man may have with this little animal" (Carter and Monahan 27). If Matta's landscapes are at all meaningful to us, Breton continued, it is because "everything that can be contemplated speaks a meaningful language which can be understood when human emotion acts as an interpreter" (Carter and Monahan 27).

Breton found a rhetorically effective way of both clarifying and justifying Matta's work from a thematic point of view, but he also moved perilously close to what John Ruskin chided the Romantics for practicing: namely, the pathetic fallacy (i.e., the unwarranted projection of human emotions upon inanimate nature). Indeed, the mind/landscape relationship is not the natural, self-declaring analogy Medina and Breton made it out to be. On the contrary, by virtue of being metaphorical, this analogy qualifies as a cultural construction, and, as such, it rests on assumptions no less time-bound and culture-specific than the previously mentioned analogy between the mind and architecture. After all, just as the idea of comparing the mind to a building—with many rooms, strata, corridors, etc.—was extrapolated from the view that the mind is riddled with hidden conflicts, forgotten memories, repressed wishes, etc., the mind-as-landscape analogy is equally contingent on the cultural assumption that the mind is limitless and infinite. Predictably, this view is again heavily indebted to Freudian theory. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud argued that consciousness comprises only "the *surface* of the mental apparatus...which is spatially the first one reached from the external world—and spatially not only in the functional sense but, on this occasion, also in the sense of anatomical dissection" (1923: 9). On this basis, Freud construes the mind as an infinitely complex spatial entity susceptible to being excavated layer by layer. Repressed thoughts are described as

> stratified concentrically round the pathogenic nucleus.... The most peripheral strata contain the memories...which...are easily remembered and have always been clearly conscious. The deeper we go the more difficult it becomes for the emerging memories to be recognized, till near the nucleus we come upon memories which the patient disavows even in reproducing them" (Breuer and Freud 289).

Since the process is potentially unending, Freud was inclined to describe psychoanalysis as possibly interminable. Against this background, and given his admiration for Freud, Matta needed but a small step to draw an analogous parallel between the concept of the mind as a spatially extended, multi-layered, and potentially unfathomable entity, and an equally limitless, multi-dimensional and hyper-complex natural landscape, infinite in variety and volume as it recedes towards the horizon. (The poem by Emily Dickinson used as an epigraph for this essay provides yet another example of such a projection.)

Not surprisingly, Matta fostered and strongly encouraged these correlations. His works, he declared, "are about landscapes at the speed of botany, not the speed of clouds or wind: prayers in the true sense of the term, exercises of individual poetry related to desires sometimes unknown" (Ferrari 1987: 217). He also insisted that, as he worked, "embryonic things, embryos of something...wanted to be born and slowly with time began to appear thus in incendiary landscapes" (Fletcher 241). These descriptions are cryptic, to be sure, but the continual references to natural phenomena speak for themselves, references Matta even sought to reinforce by calling some of his works: "inscapes" (no. 11). Although the term was actually coined by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (Mattison 26), Matta readily adopted it as his own. Claiming to explore the infinity of the mind the way others explore the vastness of space, Matta declared: "Rather than being a cosmonaut, I consider myself to be a beingonaut" (Jouffroy 56). Again, Matta conceptualizes emotional and psychological states—though they have no literal physical extension—as if they were endowed with all of the properties intrinsic to three-dimensional space. And just as we can describe emotions, metaphorically, in terms of the physical sensations of moving through buildings, we can also describe them in terms of our

belief in the infinity of nature: colloquial expressions such as "boundless energy," "unlimited generosity," "infinite kindness," or "endless love" are examples in point.

Although Matta is arguably relying on an identical strategy to construct meaning, it remains puzzling that the two discrete metaphors he employed (the mind-as-architecture and the mind-as-landscape) were deemed equally appropriate to visualize human mentation. That both metaphors recruit the physical to evoke the psychological is clear enough, but, by the same token, these tropes also rely on connotations that, at least at first glance, seem blatantly contradictory. Architectural spaces, after all, are bounded, constricted, and potentially oppressive; while landscape, especially in the way Matta portrays it, suggests vast and continuous expanses. As a result, it seems perplexing that confined and infinite spaces managed to convey the mind equally successfully. But it is instructive to note that the mind can be conceptualized very differently across various cultures and subcultures. Since our own intellectual assumptions (insofar as they have been inflected by Freudian psychoanalysis) are flexible enough to engender the view that, like space, mental states are both expansive and constrictive, then, analogously, space has proven to be an effective metaphorical medium to convey our ideas about mental states. If space is experienced as boundless and unrestricted, it serves as a metaphor for energy, generosity, kindness, freedom, or love—and proves an apt analogy to the allegedly infinite recesses of the unconscious mind; conversely, if space is experienced as confined and contained, it serves as a metaphor for obligation, frustration, slavery, or oppression—and proves an equally apt analogy for emotions such as worry and anxiety. Working under a similar set of intellectual assumptions, Matta enlisted two discretely different, yet equally "appropriate," metaphors for the human mind—architecture and landscape—to endow his work with meaning. To his mind, even linear perspective could carry metaphorical allusions if it were somehow modified with the apposite surrealist spin. "I want to replace perspective," Matta proclaimed, "by a kind of prospecting and simultaneously to replace the space of distance with the space of feeling.... All extremes—and everything that is found within them—should be seen in terms of prospecting and be expressed in a special kind of space: a space of feeling" (Haim 64).

To create his "space of feeling," Matta also posited the earth's interchangeability with all living things, a strategy that reflects (and reinforces) his inclination to project human states of mind upon inanimate objects. Accordingly, Matta expressed the view that "everything is the earth.... The earth is a canvas upon which, for extraordinary reasons, life created itself. All lives existing on the earth are connected. We ourselves are full of viruses that have as much need to live and to procreate as we do. Of the earth, therefore, we must have an image, not of a globe that turns, but of this life, this 'being'" (Haim 41). These correlations between the self and the non-self, or between humanity and nature, were then strengthened by Matta's tactic of representing form in a state, not just of flux, but also of constant permeability. After all, if solid forms were made to merge or turn inside out, then the very distinction Matta sought to destroy—i.e., that between external physical space and inner mental space—could be declared moot. Not surprisingly, the artist Gerome Kamrowski recalled how Tanguy and Matta's evocation of mental states by means of landscape was literally contingent upon the violation of boundaries: "What is inside is outside. They probed the interior world for answers to the exterior world" (Miller 25). In reality, the relationship was the other way round: it was an exterior landscape that Matta and Tanguy used to connote the interior world of emotion, not the interior world of emotion that provided a model for representing landscapes. But to mitigate any suggestion that their evocation of mental states was actually dependent on a conventional depiction of natural forms, Tanguy and Matta gave geological and vegetal formations the appearance of inner organs.

This polyvalence, in turn, helped valorize both Matta's use of paradoxical expressions such as "psychological morphologies" or "inscapes," as well as his claim that landscape imagery somehow created "visual equivalences to various states of consciousness" (Ferrari 1987: 219). The very iconographical implications of breaking down the barriers between the inner and the outer, or between the inside and the outside, proved so powerful as to have also profoundly inflected the work of Matta's friend and later rival, Arshile Gorky (fig. 9). Gorky was no less interested in the evocative possibilities of natural forms than Matta, and even shocked André Breton by painting directly before nature, a practice that, in principle, was deemed inimical to Surrealism's project of eliciting unconscious imagery

Fig. 9
Arshile Gorky, *The Liver is the Cock's Comb*, 1944, oil on canvas, 73 1/4 x 98 in. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1956. (c) 1996 Agnes Fielding/Artists' Rights Society, New York.

through accident and automatism. But Gorky's habit of abstracting and subjecting nature to psychological projection trumped any misgivings Breton may have held toward the empirical observation of nature. Like Matta, Gorky left his hybrid forms poetically ambiguous and, as much as Matta, made them suggestive of internal anatomy as much as of external phenomena. Although generally more reticent than Matta about explaining the meaning of his work, Gorky nonetheless betrayed the fundamental affinity between both artists by proclaiming: "I try to probe beyond the ordinary and the known. I create an interior infinity. I probe within the finite's confines to create an infinity. Liver. Bones. Living rocks and living plants and animals" (Mooradian 275). Especially appreciative of this aspect of Gorky's work, Matta recalled that, during their conversations, Gorky expressed a keen interest in the "difference between the whole and the one, the container and the contained" (Kozloff 25). Partly inspired to collapse the differences between inner and outer from Matta's example, Gorky thus provided an analog for the disconcerting sensation we would feel if the boundaries of our own bodies were suddenly to give way, as if our bodies—being turned inside out, as it were—would merge with the external world. Matta, of course, felt very much in tune with this idea, and during an interview with Jean-Claude Carrière, declared that he felt that "more than happiness, man has a need to be part of the universe. A cosmic need" (Ferrari 1987: 55). "I am trying," he also wrote, "to enter into solidarity with the universe..." (Ferrari 1987: 75). Elizabeth A. T. Smith and Colette Dartnall even described how Matta, when visiting Mexico, used his witnessing a volcano eruption to establish a correlation between "himself and the explosive earth...and volcanic imagery began to appear in his work, indicating cataclysmic emotions and ideas pouring from his inner self" (17).

Like Gorky, therefore, Matta tried to convey a sense of solidarity with nature, but—also like Gorky—he did not conceive of nature as a pastoral, benign landscape. Hoping to find "some reference in my mental space to the human being" (Simon 19), Matta confessed: "the best image of my body was a volcano" (Ferrari 1987: 226). His choice of words is apposite because, given the great diversity of natural forms, the volcano has become the phenomenon of choice to devise metaphors for pent up emotions (consider the expressions: "he erupted with anger," "he blew his top," "his temper is volcanic," etc.). Thus, if Matta enlisted natural analogies to make repressed human emotions manifest, it is hardly surprising that the volcano suited his iconographic and rhetorical purposes like a glove. Volcanic references, moreover, dovetailed nicely with Matta's emphasis on dynamic energy and continual change, which he conveyed on canvas by means of visual contrast. On this point, Martica Sawin made the important observation that Matta loved to combine antithetical means, mixing, "freely applied color and taut brush-drawn construction" (1985: 34). The multiplicity of effects and uncomfortable visual collisions typical of Matta's technique, in turn, bolstered the mind-as-landscape analogy (because the very ambiguity of his forms short-circuited any attempt to identify them securely as belonging to the internal or external world) and further sharpened what the artist endeavored to communicate about the mind (by intimating that effects of dynamic energy and visual tension stood for mental energy and psychological tension). For Matta, in other words, the

visual dissonances of which Sawin so eloquently speaks served as yet another metaphorical attempt to bring the physical and psychological in line by making visual conflict stand for mental conflict.

Taken, as most Surrealists were, with Freudian ideas, Matta subscribed to the view that the moral dictates of Western civilization were so oppressive as to tear the self between Ego and Id, personal desire and societal expectation, self-satisfaction and self-control, attraction and revulsion, longing and guilt. After all, "The Ego," Freud was fond of saying, "was not the master in its own house." Matta, in fact, reiterated the Freudian worldview nearly verbatim in the following passage: "We are saturated with primitive and destructive feelings which we must control. This is precisely where our civic sense starts, with the control of these feelings" (Tasende Gallery 13). Taking this view of mental life (and of the divided, pluralistic self) to heart, Matta, as Valerie Fletcher so aptly described it, "painted abstract images of states of continuous evolution, whose metamorphosing colored forms express a primordial struggle for equilibrium in a cosmos dominated by opposing forces—analogous to the individual in turmoil who struggles to attain a balance of emotions within his or her psyche" (241). Along these lines, it is highly revealing that Matta, when perusing his 1985 retrospective exhibition in Paris, experienced such surprise at the great range of his own artistic production as even to question whether this output had actually been the result of a single, unitary personality. "I have no social sense," he commented, "of the many 'MEs' who have produced all of this. It is as if I myself were composed of a whole people, many small Mattas who had each painted one of these works. In any case, it must be someone to whom strange things must have happened. There is no identification on my part" (Haim 15).

Making the Invisible Visible?

Freud's impact on Matta's worldview extended well beyond the artist's endorsement of the idea of the divided self. Freud's importance to twentieth-century intellectual life, after all, does not rest on the rather pedestrian view that the human condition was one of unremitting mental conflict; on the contrary, his crucial contribution to the field of psychology also mandated that human beings, to the detriment of their very emotional tranquility, tend to *repress* the very causes of this conflict into the unconscious mind. The act of repressing our most intimate wishes and desires is so total and profound, according to Freud, that we lose cognizance both of the content of our own wishes, and of the very fact of our having repressed them. This imperfect and provisional solution to mental conflict is detrimental to mental health, he believed, because it is our very tendency to repress disturbing thoughts and ideas which, in turn, precipitates the onset and severity of neurotic symptoms. Indeed, even if they are subject to repression, and even if they function outside our awareness, unconscious wishes tighten their grip on our mental lives and still long, if only surreptitiously, to be satisfied. Unbeknownst to us, they unhinge our emotional tranquility and psychic equilibrium in the form of neuroses, inexplicable dreams, irrational phobias, slips of the tongue, and even manifest themselves in works of art. According to Freudian theory, relieving these symptoms is thus strictly contingent upon the analyst's ability to provide patients with what they desperately lack: namely, cognitive insight into the very wishes and desires that, when repressed, bedevil their mental life. The task is especially arduous, of course, not simply because repression is such a powerful force, but also because its very existence signals how acutely these wishes engender feelings of shame and revulsion among the patients harboring them. As a result, patients will be relieved of their symptoms only if the analyst, after breaking down their defenses, persuades them to accept the true content of the very repressed wishes and pathogenic thoughts that triggered the symptoms in the first place. In view of the above, Freud not only stipulated that the mind is a house divided against itself; it was also an indispensable requirement of his theory that human beings remain largely unaware of the most critical aspects of their own condition. On his account, everyday experience betrays little more than a deceptive facade that obfuscates a deeper psychological reality inaccessible to the majority of human beings.

Revealingly, Matta constructed the rationale for his own work in nearly identical terms. Since man "has to cover his destructive instincts," Matta declared, he must "invent a better face or mask in order to survive.... Without this defense his equilibrium is altered, it puts man out of his existence." Also consistent with Freudian theory is Matta's assertion that art is a privileged means of breaking through the deception. Through

art, he continucd, we may "put away the mask and the shell to show our own face and make a better system for human relations" (Tasende Gallery 13). Accordingly, Matta frequently declared that the motivation underlying his own work was a desire to "grasp what lies behind appearance" (Ferrari 1987: 226). Speaking with Jean-Claude Carrière, moreover, he iterated his ambition to reveal what "is invisible within himself" (Ferrari 1987: 55). "I am trying to scize the unknown," he also professed, "the transparent region, the unknown or the invisible of a situation" (Sawin 1985: 36). His ultimate purpose, he proclaimed elsewhere, was thc creation of "a new image of man that won't leave behind, aside or hidden all the things which are hidden" (Miller 11). The Freudian tenor of these comments is unmistakable; and, not surprisingly, the powerful trope of rendering the "invisible visible" is repeated, not just in Matta's statements, but also in the critical literature on his work. In his lectures at the New School for Social Research in New York, for instance, the artist Gordon Onslow Ford described Matta as providing "a glimpse of that marvelous world that is perhaps buried in each of us" (Smith and Dartnall 16). And aftcr listening extensively to Matta, Carrière described the artist as "seeing things that others do not sec, or see badly," as presenting things that, "were it not for him, would remain invisible" (Ferrari 1995: 9).

Since such diagnostic remarks were directly extrapolated from the artist's comments themselves, which, in turn, were extrapolated from Freud, then it is incumbent upon a student of Matta's work to examine further the critical assumptions underlying the artist's momcntous claim that his paintings somehow succeed in rendering the "invisible visible." From the very outset, what is most striking about the artist's contention is—again—its patently metaphorical naturc. After all, since rendering the "invisible visible" requires what is ostensibly invisible to assume a visible—and therefore physical—form, then it stands to reason, as we have been arguing throughout this essay, that Matta's approach, like much metaphorical mapping, recruits the more tangible physical realm to convey the more intangible emotional or psychological realm. And since invisible thoughts and ideas, by definition, cannot be portrayed literally, they can only be visualized by analogy: in Matta's case, by means of architecture or landscape. In this respect, it is intriguing to relate Jean-Philippe Domecq's rccollection that, during conversation, Matta would often grasp a piece of paper and scribble a drawing in order to clarify a point he was making, so persuaded was he that a sketch would better explain an idea than verbal language. "Matta's reflex is not simply that of a painter," Domecq astutely observes, "but is common to all of us because there is no reasoning of ours that does not emanate from a schema, nor any idea that is not mentally graphic" (71). For such a schematic or graphic transposition to take shape, however, Domecq concedes that Matta must resort to metaphors, which, to his mind, translate "the unknown into the language of the known" (71). On this account, Matta is simply doing what we all do: we transpose what we *do not* know in terms of what we *do* know, relying, however tacitly, upon whatever intellectual paradigm, interpretive framework, or mental set we happen to endorse at the moment.

But making such an admission implies that portraying human mentation graphically by means of landscape or architecture stands, per force, as a culturally situated interpretive act, not as a natural, transparent, or self-declaring analogy. In fact, without the Freudian assumptions about the mind that Matta himself unflinchingly endorsed, as well as the metaphors Freud employed to articulate them, it is highly unlikely that the mind-as-architecture or the mind-as-landscape metaphors would have held such sway over Matta. It is those very Freudian assumptions, arguably, not the discovery of some unknown entity inaccessible to the rest of us, that underlie the artist's seemingly innocent insistence that he had grasped "what lies behind appearance," or had rendered the "invisible visible." There are important interpretive implications to be noted here. The most crucial is *not* that an autonomous, self-standing, and "invisible" entity exists independently of our minds and is suddenly rendered visible by virtue of the artist's privileged insight; but, rather, that the existence of this entity, the claims for its invisibility, and the very forms by which it will be rendered "visible," were all predetermined, from the very outset, by Matta's ideological predispositions and Freudian loyalties. Not only is the idea that human thoughts or emotions can take the shape of architecture or landscape, but the very assumption that those thoughts and emotions are first "invisible" and then rendered visible by extraordinary measures, is also predetermined by the cardinal postulates of Freudian

thought—a strategy intentionally calculated to bolster the impression that the artist had, by virtue of his singular wisdom, unearthed a reality simply unfathomable to ordinary individuals.

All of the above suggests that Matta appropriated the rhetorical strategy as much as the interpretive premises of Freudian psychoanalysis. It was related above, after all, that the concept of repression—the *sine qua non* of Freudian theory—mandates that most human beings remain largely ignorant of the true mental predicament in which they find themselves. This same predicament, moreover, hidden and camouflaged like some buried treasure, lies conveniently unreachable without an analyst's intervention, a tacit acknowledgement, if anything, of the analyst's privileged position vis-à-vis the helpless, ignorant patient. Crucial to Freudian thought, therefore—or, for that matter, to any philosophy postulating the existence of a "hidden" or "invisible" reality--is an asymmetrical power relationship between those who have access to this reality and those who do not. Freud masterfully played on this asymmetry to enforce the subservience of his patients, to insure loyalty among his acolytes, and to win over converts to his school of thought (see Roazen). By cloaking his work in a similar guise, Matta betrays, not only the fervor with which he subscribed to Freudian dogma and wished to visualize its findings in his art, but, even more importantly perhaps, how quickly he recognized the power of its rhetoric to earn him praise and recognition. Purporting to having translated previously hidden, unknown, or invisible human mental states into paint, and hoping to win others over just as completely as he had himself been won over by Freud, Matta labored, arguably, to usurp the psychoanalyst's very position of authority for himself. And if the way his claims about making the "invisible visible" have been uncritically brandished in the literature provides any indication, his rhetorical stratagem can only be described as an unqualified success.

It should be said, of course, that Freud was not the only thinker on Matta's radar screen to have argued along these lines. It is frequently mentioned that Matta, as well as Onslow Ford, were highly taken with P.D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*, a book whose ideas could be seen as laying, along with Freud's, the intellectual groundwork for many of Matta's beliefs. In fact, Ouspensky's rhetorical strategy is strikingly similar to Freud's. "The prison house," Ouspensky insists, "is the world of sight...the artist must be a clairvoyant, must see that which others do not see and must possess the gift of making others see what they do not see by themselves." For Martica Sawin, who cited this specific passage from Ouspensky, such pronouncements coincide perfectly with "Matta's reiteration of his concern with the verb 'to see' and his repeated declaration that he is not concerned with making paintings, but with '*making visible*'" (1985: 35). Intriguingly, verbs such as "to see" or "to perceive" are also loaded with metaphorical associations. Although first used to describe physical perception, they evolved across cultures, as languages became more complex and sophisticated, to convey cognitive understanding or intellectual insight (Sweetser 43). These metaphorical mappings provide yet more examples of how a literal, physical activity (e.g., looking) can convey a more abstract, psychological idea (e.g., knowledge and discernment). But it must be remembered that these metaphorical expressions remain analogies, approximations, or projections; and that seeing, after all, *is not literally understanding.* Intriguingly, Matta himself seemed highly cognizant of the potentially misleading aspects of metaphor when he admitted to Paul Haim that his interest lay with

> the passions of the spirit, not of the body. But the spirit is, itself, not easy to define. It is that which animates us, of which we possess no image, and which makes our vision more or less idolatrous. All of us have our idols, sometime a little anthropomorphic, thus false, because spirit cannot take the form of a body. We are dealing here with another territory (Haim 24).

But no sooner does Matta condemn anthropomorphic embodiments of spiritual matters—correctly—for being false and misleading, than he—dismayingly—commits the very same transgression by embodying his own spiritual ideas in corporeal form. Scuttling his own (highly persuasive) argument, he recants his position in the very next sentence: "I prefer to imagine [the spirit as] a kind of river, with, in flotation, a curious snake, fish, tortoises, flowers, things of this kind, encompassing generation, fecundity, reproduction, the survival of the species" (Haim 24).

In effect, despite recognizing how potentially false and even idolatrous metaphors can be, Matta conceptualized the mind in no less metaphorical, and therefore no less false or idolatrous, a way. In a short essay called "Homme de terre" (Man of the Earth)—a probable pun on the French term for

potato (*pomme de terre*) which literally means "apple from the earth"—Matta not only uses countless metaphors to visualize mental energy, but he again construes mental energy as a kind of kernel of truth that may be discerned only by those endowed with exceptional insight into the reality of things. The relevant passage in "Homme de terre" is so revealing as to be worth citing at length:

> Since the beginning, a working hypothesis has been that within being there exists a form of energy yet to be identified, that of mental matter. By means of anthropomorphism, people identify thought with gray matter. The fruit of the brain, is energy, it is currents that bombard each other with images at non-graphic velocities. In this first day of the world, the most valid images are those of gaseous explosions, of flames, of disintegrations that can only be imagined on a chemical level. This field of mental energy, one can approach it only by diving into it, not by reading it, but where a deductive system may be discovered.
>
> If one could imagine going very far, more deeply in mental states, in mental geology, one would see an effervescence of energies functioning eternally within each species. Thanks to mathematics, and to language, one may be able to differentiate one from the other, identify them, name them. One uses anger, will, but I see an image closer to solar energy. The sun, it is a sphere of energy that reconstitutes itself by exploding, that falls back upon itself, that "re(organ)izes" itself constantly. In every being, there is a kernel from which energy originates and which, at the same time, modifies and puts into rhythm. This kernel, which we can, for a lack of a better term, call sun can also be baptized as threshold. It is the principle of entrance and departure being one and the same, an energetic abode comparable to the solar system, because we have within us other kernels that hope to detach themselves, but which are held back by the gravitational pull of the Me, the I, or by what is unique in all of us. Human energy is an expanding system within a universe, like a cosmos (Ferrari 1995: 14).

Although this passage reinforces how Matta's claim to have pictured the mind was predicated upon establishing metaphorical allusions between human beings and natural phenomena, it also betrays how that same claim became inextricable from another: namely, that the artist had unveiled a *hidden* "truth" or kernel of mental reality that lies (literally) deep within the individual. Whether Matta appropriated this conception from Freud, Ouspensky, or both is, at this juncture, less important than its broader implications. Among the most significant is that, in spite of his occasional misgivings about Surrealism, and of his own exclusion from the group in 1948, Matta endorsed its cardinal premises unflinchingly. Paraphrasing Breton, Matta insisted that "Surrealism's function was to give an image of the real functioning of thinking, without esthetic or moral prejudice" (Kozloff 26; Haim 114), a project which, as the passages cited above make abundantly clear, Matta took up as his own. By asserting, moreover, that the object of abstract art was the "engineering and structuring of feelings or situations, and understanding those situations," and that his own art approached "what really goes on in man's experience" (Kozloff 26), Matta readily acknowledged his firm belief that states of mind could be accurately represented in art, and, no less significantly, that his own work managed to do precisely that.

Art versus Science? Matta's Schemata

Although many artists and thinkers such as Freud and Ouspensky have readily employed the seductive rhetoric of having uncovered a reality otherwise inaccessible to the rest of us, it remains somewhat surprising that the majority of critics and art historians have abstained from subjecting Matta's statements, or his whole way of conceptualizing the mind, to any kind of critical scrutiny. It never even occurred to a suspicious critic such as Rubin to take Matta's claims at anything other than face value. Describing Matta's work as evoking "a kind of electrical system of the mind," with areas "on the surface" of the psyche and others "deeply recessed," Rubin, usually highly critical of any depictions of three-dimensionality in modern art, nonetheless took it for granted that the mind is a three-dimensional space where mental energy flows like water or runs like an electric current. In so doing, Rubin accepts the view that mental energy—in typical Freudian fashion—is subject to freedom and constraint, to being channeled, backed up, redirected, or frustrated from its proclivity to seek the path of least resistance. Octavio Paz was less critical still: Matta's paintings, he asserted, "are not transcriptions of psychical and spiritual states, they are the unseen made visible, more exactly, *incarnated*" (24). It is, of course, a common tendency among critics and scholars in the humanities to heroicize and mythologize their objects of study. But it is also incumbent upon them to eval-

uate artists' statements, and the intellectual ideas and concepts underwriting them, from a critical stance.

When Rubin described Matta as having effectively portrayed the complexity of the human psyche, for example—some of whose layers lie closer to the surface and are more accessible, while others, forcefully repressed, lie deep within the mind—his description is, of course, Freudian through and through. In the passage from *Studies on Hysteria* already cited above, Freud had described repressed thoughts as "stratified concentrically round the pathogenic nucleus.... The most peripheral strata contain the memories...which...are easily remembered and have always been clearly conscious. The deeper we go the more difficult it becomes for the emerging memories to be recognized, till near the nucleus we come upon memories which the patient disavows even in reproducing them." Although this excerpt was previously quoted in order to trace correlations between Matta and Freud, it is repeated here to underscore how Matta picked up on a key, but highly controversial, aspect of Freudian theory. In fact, Freud's construal of the mind as a spatial entity open to excavation layer by layer came in for harsh criticism from his own collaborator and co-author, Joseph Breuer. Breuer's disapproval is highly instructive because it strikes at the very heart of Freud's (and, by extension, Matta's) metaphorical way of picturing human mentation. "It is only too easy to fall into a habit of thought," the more cautious Breuer writes, "which assumes that every substantive has a substance behind it—which gradually comes to regard 'consciousness' as standing for some actual thing; and when we have become accustomed to make use metaphorically of spatial relations, as in the term 'sub-consciousness,' we find as time goes on that we have actually formed an idea which has lost its metaphorical nature and which we can manipulate easily as though it was real. Our mythology is then complete" (Breuer and Freud 227–28). Breuer's criticisms thus not only target the topographical view of the mind, they also undermine the very probative value of any claims contingent upon this concept. "All our thinking," Breuer continues, "tends to be accompanied and aided by spatial ideas, and we talk in spatial metaphors" (228). Although he does not discount the existence of the unconscious, Breuer warns against being "misled into supposing that these relations are literally present in the brain," or against the danger of being "tricked by our own figures of speech" (228).

Breuer's argument has remarkable force. If Freud's view of the mind as a stratified entity led him to associate the literal depth of each stratum with the degree of repression to which a thought or wish was subjected, Breuer rejoins that this spatial interpretation was more metaphorical than literal; and, more importantly, that Freud's methodological blunder consisted precisely in confusing a metaphorical relationship for a literal one. It is patently fallacious, Breuer intimates, to mistake a metaphorical picture of an entity for the entity itself—a fallacy to which Freud, as he so intelligently noticed, invariably succumbed. This point is pertinent here, of course, because it clearly applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Matta himself. By claiming that the mind is "like a passage, a little like water" (Ferrari 1995: 55), and that his work succeeded in drawing "geographical maps of human nature and of its energies" (Haim 118), Matta inherits the (mistaken) Freudian assumptions that mental energy moves in a manner analogous to fluids in hydraulic systems—with "sums of psychical energy" subject to "psychical damming-up" and "discharge"—and that repressed human emotions are literally "located" in the deeper areas of the brain. Which is not to say that all of Freud's assumptions about correspondences between the physical and psychological have no validity; only that, without the benefit of MRI's, CAT-scans, and electrocardiograms, he had insufficient opportunity to corroborate or even observe these correspondences first-hand. Although he began his medical career as an anatomist, Freud abstained from giving his patients physical examinations; and even if he had, his nineteenth-century assumptions about the actions of the nervous system would have led him woefully astray. According to contemporary neurophysiologist J. Allan Hobson, Freud's psychoanalytic ideas on repression were derived "from an erroneous picture of the nervous system.... Freud assumed...that the nervous system was devoid of either synaptic contact or inhibition; that *it was incapable of losing, discarding, or canceling information*; that it was, in fact, a passive receptacle of both energy and information; able to create neither and to get rid of either one only via some motor action. We now know that none of these ideas is correct" (Hobson 53, 62). "Once this dual set of postulates, that information cannot be constructed and that information cannot be lost, is broken," Hobson concludes, "many Freudian arguments founder disastrously" (44).

It may seem unfair to visit upon Matta the very same scientific criticisms launched by present-day neurophysiologists against Freud. Since artists seldom tread upon scientific territory, and cannot be held to its unforgiving standards, it may prove misguided to take Matta too literally when he touted his art's ability to outline "geographical maps of human nature and of its energies." This objection is not without force. But Matta's claim was not simply that he, like many artists, visualized the mind against a predigested interpretive template supplied by Freud. His claim, rather, was that his work also provided his audience with such cognitive insight into the workings of the mind that the information thereby revealed would improve their mental state. "What I want," Matta insisted, "is an art that...is at the disposal of everyone to be used, not an art that one goes to a museum to see, but an art that helps you know yourself and grow" (Miller 16). "The artist," he said elsewhere, "is a public servant trying to wake up the viewers" (Arts Council 1984: 6). Matta is thereby insinuating that his art is less a source of aesthetic enjoyment than a vehicle for self-understanding and self-improvement. On this account, it again stands to reason that Matta's confidence in his art's capacity to induce self-knowledge was also modeled after the therapeutic claims made by Freudian psychoanalysis. But these claims were highly ambitious. In the analytic context, therapeutic results are to be expected only if the cognitive insight provided to the patient during the course of treatment is deemed to be demonstrably accurate. And insight may be deemed demonstrably accurate only if it induces therapeutic results. Accordingly, Freud insisted that patients could not be relieved of their symptoms by suggestive manipulation or by a false diagnosis; a patient's conflicts, rather, "will only be successfully solved and his resistances overcome if the anticipatory ideas he is given [by the analyst] *tally with what is real in him.* Whatever in the doctor's conjectures is inaccurate drops out in the course of the analysis; it has to be withdrawn and replaced by something more correct [italics mine]" (1917: 452).

Matta's parallel assertion—i.e., that his art also provokes personal growth in its audience on account of the wisdom it ostensibly disseminates—betrays his analogous confidence in having disclosed the hitherto mysterious realities of human psychology. Of course, Matta may only have made such assertions in jest, as a rhetorical ploy, a clever attempt to confer the prestige and authority of psychoanalysis upon his own work. But it is intriguing to note that even committed Freudians such as the Surrealists grew highly suspicious of Matta precisely on account of his "scientific" pretensions. Although no less convinced of Freud's claim that psychoanalysis stands shoulder to shoulder with any hard empirical science, the Surrealists sought to elicit the inner workings of the mind through poetic and artistic means alone. And if Freud's ambition was to interpret art and poetry in a perfectly logical and rigorously scientific manner, the Surrealists, conversely, saw their own responsibility as producing the very fantastical and illogical elements that proved ripe *for* analysis—not a dispassionate understanding of the mind along the strict guidelines mandated by analysis itself. Being detached and analytical would, in their view, stymie their powers of invention, and make them no different from Freud himself. Matta, however, went too far in the Freudian direction (or, at least, professed to do so). His scientific pretensions ran afoul of Surrealism's dictates, and, as a result, cost him his membership in the movement. "To pronounce the word 'science,'" Matta told Paul Haim, "revealed an intellectual incompatibility that aggravated moral indignation. My exclusion [from the surrealist group] was formulated on these terms.... No one spoke to me anymore" (Haim 54).

Yet Matta never denied the charge; he insisted, rather, that science "is as poetical as poetry. The scientist is a poet, a man absolutely trying to detect the functioning of reality. To aim towards science was the next step in this question of change and not using familiar appearances of things to get to the other side of the moon of things, to the side we don't see but is very active" (Miller 17). Matta went so far as to liken his own concerns to those of scientists: "My preoccupations can be compared to those of the astrophysicist, of the mathematician.... There exists a non-visual content to that kind of research, to which art must address itself to render more visible a part of the invisible" (Haim 75). Even his use of force lines and curved orthogonals can be interpreted as attempts to visualize Einstein's view that gravity was not a force in the conventional sense, but the curvature of space. In fact, Matta made a point of flaunting his admiration for Einstein, counting him, along with Freud, among the most important and influential thinkers of the twentieth century (Arts Council 1984: 10). No doubt aware of the prestige potentially bestowed on anyone even remotely connected with

the new physics, Matta marshaled all of his rhetorical skills to align his own work with quantum science. "The famous 'human condition,'" he quipped, "could be equated in terms of human and anti-human particles, a field where our emotions collide with our interest in a high energy psyche that cannot be put into words until a new Art, where the coïgitum of this subcroscopic eye will give another picture of societies, of humanity, of the species" (Arts Council 1977: 8).

Again, Matta's propensity to employ pseudo-scientific gobbledygook may simply reflect a feeble attempt to enhance his prestige by claiming the authority of science. By voicing such pretensions, however, Matta invites his audience to judge his ideas with at least a modicum of skepticism. Take his use of the term "morphology." In a very calculating, if not to say conniving, way, Matta deliberately appropriated this term from scientific discourse in order to legitimize both his formal experiments and their purported ability to portray the evolution of emotional states. Dismayingly, the majority of art historians have taken the artist at his word. Reviewing a 1944 exhibition, for example, an *Art News* critic wrote: "In the same way that modern philosophy is primarily based on physics, so the modern artist, if he is a serious artist, is pledged to interpret scientific facts—called phenomena—which are the true realities of life. So thinks and so paints Matta Echaurren..." (Frost 18). Similarly, Sabine Eckmann explained that Matta "wanted to create art that would, in a way analogous to science, reveal the constantly shifting existential forms of an object or a phenomenon, depicting the process of change itself" (Carter and Monahan 19). And for Alvaro Medina, Matta succeeded in being "a painter of matter in perpetual movement. His painting reveals physical and psychic stages of transmutation...he is the artist of the non-permanent in permanence" (69).

But whether a dynamic process such as change could itself be depicted on canvas, and how this depiction could approximate "the constantly shifting existential forms of an object or a phenomenon" is a question Eckmann, Medina, and for that matter Matta himself, never fully addressed. Matta's paintings, after all, cannot transcribe change literally. Within the intrinsic limits of a static idiom such as painting (i.e., an idiom restricted to single visual frames), transcribing change would, of necessity, require depicting the same object in incremental stages of evolution. Matta, however, simply painted a wide repertory of ambiguous, bulging, and throbbing forms—which, when subjected to projection, might give the *illusion* of potential growth—and summarily declared these same forms to have visualized the evolution of organisms from one state to the other. It then took no additional effort—at least for one blessed with Matta's powers of persuasion—to profess that, even on this flimsy basis, the cachet and respectability of science should be bestowed upon his work. But to accept the claim that an organism's growth had indeed been transcribed in art, a spectator would, arguably, need to recognize the organism in question first, differentiate the actual stages of its growth according to legitimate grounds for comparison, and assess whether or not growth had in fact occurred. Despite demonstrating none of this, Matta felt confident enough in his public's naïveté to deflect any skepticism concerning either the appropriateness of the term "morphology" or the scientific status of his art.

Yet it is not simply the claim that Matta's work traced the evolution of physical forms that may strike a contemporary investigator as specious; it is also the further pretense that these changes betrayed, *mutatis mutandis*, the evolution of thoughts, ideas, or emotions. Despite being far more tenuous, however, this claim was, ironically enough, even easier to pull off. Since we have no physical access to mental states, we have no way of knowing what they "look like," or, for that matter, whether they even "look like" anything. But a master rhetorician like Matta manipulated this situation with inordinate skill. Since our cultural proclivities and linguistic expressions encourage us to think of thoughts and emotions as immaterial and mutable—proclivities upon which Matta consciously capitalized—then we are already predisposed (if not highly susceptible) to think of mentation as "looking" amorphously biological or loosely gaseous like the forms depicted by Matta. Unaware of how firmly these prejudices guide our own expectations, we assume that Matta's metaphorical projections are somehow "appropriate." And forgetting that these projections are, after all, metaphorical rather than literal—and that the very claim of making the "invisible visible" rests on such obviously tenuous grounds—we fall prey to the artist's pretense to having opened a previously inaccessible avenue into the mind. Consider, for example, how Jean-Claude Carrière describes Matta's aims as trying "to reach the origins, seldom experienced, of our most

secret drives. To do so, he must forgo a certain form of consciousness (what we frequently take to be the most supreme form of consciousness) in order to acquire another. It is then that he becomes a reader of the invisible" (Ferrari 1995: 11). Matta, of course, helped such readings along: he told Paul Haim that, although at "the time of Descartes, the possibilities of conceiving being as a fabric of energies, of lights and of pulses were minimal. Today we can conceive an image of being that is far more transparent" (Haim 24).

Although Matta blundered, like Freud, by mistaking a metaphorical for a literal image of the brain, it is significant to point out that even contemporary neuroscientists use metaphorical terms (e.g., wiring, circuitry, connectivity) to describe the activity of neurons. It is easy to see why; given how little is still known about brain functioning, and how central to human cognition metaphor turns out to be, metaphorical expressions are often the only discursive tools we have to articulate difficult concepts. But recognizing how connections between brain cells grow and atrophy, present-day neuroscientists, unlike Freud and Matta, employ such analogies for heuristic purposes only. Readily acknowledging the inherent limitations of metaphorical terms, contemporary scientists would never fall into the trap of thinking that the brain is literally like a river, a landscape, a switchboard, or a computer. Matta's clever use of the term "transparency," however, bespeaks altogether different motives: namely, to trumpet his own success in his search for truth, and that to insist his metaphors allow human mentation to be seen, clearly, in the light of day. That the mind's inner mechanisms remain shrouded in complete mystery, moreover, made them a perfect candidate for the artist's professed goal of "making the invisible visible" (essentially, because there was no way of corroborating how closely Matta's work approximated the appearance of human thought); while the purported difficulty of the enterprise made it even more likely to earn the artist praise once his audience was persuaded that the goal was met. The artist could hence claim credit for having disclosed how the mind works without ever running the risk of his stratagem ever being discovered. Just as Freud saw repressed thoughts located concentrically around a pathogenic nucleus, and everyday human behavior as a facade whose deceptive veneer it is the psychoanalyst's task to unmask, Matta, pretending to "put away the mask and the shell," marshaled a strikingly similar rhetoric to beguile his public into thinking that he had indeed mapped the intricate ways and by-ways of the human mind.

But if Breuer exposed the weaknesses endemic to Freud's topographical view of the mind, another of Freud's Viennese compatriots, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, took serious issue with his other crucial claim of having uncovered "hidden" aspects of the psyche. Unusually alert to the seductive nature of Freud's terminology, Wittgenstein cautioned that Freudian explanations are successful because "they have a peculiar charm. The picture of people having subconscious thoughts has a charm. The idea of an underworld, a secret cellar. Something hidden, uncanny" (1967: 25). Yet Freud, Wittgenstein reasoned, "has very intelligent reasons for saying what he says, great imagination, and colossal prejudice, and prejudice which is very likely to mislead people" (1967: 26). Seeing the mind as a hidden repository of repressed thoughts and ideas—something like a secret cellar—misleads, according to Wittgenstein, not simply because it confuses the metaphorical with the literal, but also because it promotes a false picture of mental states. The picture is false, first, because it speciously divides human behavior into "inner" and "outer" aspects, and, second, because it explains one, illegitimately, by virtue of the other. "The concept of the 'inner picture' is misleading," Wittgenstein postulates, "for this concept uses the '*outer* picture' as a model; and yet the uses of the words for these concepts are no more like one another than the uses of 'numeral' and 'number'" (1958: 196). In other words, describing the "inner" life by referencing "external" objects muddles the issue of mental states because "inner" thoughts and "external" objects are nothing alike. Intriguingly for our purposes, Wittgenstein's critique of Freud, and, more specifically, of using an "outer picture" to describe the "inner" life of the mind, not only has remarkable force, but it also describes Matta's stratagem with deadly accuracy, both in terms of the artist's use of architecture and landscape to evoke the mind, and of his intimations that an obfuscated reality—"invisible" to all but the most perceptive of individuals—was miraculously made "visible" by means of his new morphology. Making the "invisible visible" is to speak nonsense, Wittgenstein would argue, because what makes the "inner" life what it is, is that there is nothing even remotely "visible" about it; using the expression "the mor-

phology of desire" is no better, he would have added, because desires have no physical form.

Wittgenstein's critique of the concept of the "inner" dovetails nicely with Breuer's critique of the spatial view of the mind, and, for this reason, both are directly relevant to this essay's stated purpose of evaluating Matta's claims from a more critical standpoint. Against this background, it is easy to see how appropriating Freud's view of the mind led Matta into being "tricked," as Breuer would say, "by his own figures of speech," while appropriating Freud's rhetorical strategy made him use these same tricks, as Wittgenstein would say, to "mislead people." Yet in spite of such epistemic blunders, Matta's strategy proved remarkably successful. Even astute critics like Nancy Miller—who readily acknowledged that Matta "evolved an art based on metaphor...[on] pictorial analogies for the psyche" (Miller 19)—were reluctant to pursue the logical implications of this statement any further. Matta, Miller continues, "explored the functions of the human mind and brought forth, in drawings and paintings, imagery that would reveal a new definition of man and his universe" (18). For his part, Matta either played innocent, or was simply oblivious to the epistemological quandary in which he placed himself: "I am simply a man," he told Paul Haim, "who testifies morphologically to what I see" (Haim 103). It neither occurred to him to differentiate the metaphorical from the literal, nor to gain enough critical distance from the ideas he had inherited from Freud and the Surrealists to detect how much they skewed how his experiences were not only expressed, but even first conceptualized. In other words, it is not simply that Freudian theory provided Matta with the appropriate conceptual tools and visual metaphors through which he could express his ideas; it is, rather, that without Freudian conceptual tools and visual metaphors, Matta would not have had the ideas he had about the mind in the first place.

On this point, the critic Harold Rosenberg made a critically valid observation. If fully endorsed, he argued, the intellectual premises underwriting systems of thought such as psychoanalysis or Marxism will ferment preconceived ideas so powerful in an artist's mind as to preclude his or her art from ever emerging spontaneously from personal experience. Rosenberg, of course, hits the nail right on the head. Breton may have proclaimed that Matta's work simply represented "the inner man" (Haim 62), but, as we have seen throughout this essay, a direct representation of "the inner man" is an epistemological impossibility. The very concept of the "inner" not only leads, as Wittgenstein argued, to a misleading account of mental states, but its "depiction" in art can only be achievable through some form of encoding, i.e., through the mediation of time-bound and culture-specific metaphors such as the ones supplied by Freud. Which is not to say that Matta should be criticized for attempting to portray the mind through the lens of preconceived ideas. After all, not only do preconceived ideas, tacit assumptions, mental sets, and the like, condition the nature and content of thought, but without preconceived ideas, tacit assumptions, and mental sets, there would be no such thing as thought in the first place. So the point at issue is not that Matta relied on preconceived ideas (since this is a transgression which we all commit); the point, rather, is that implicit in Matta's claim to unveil the psyche bare, literally and transparently, is a complete independence *from* preconceived ideas.

It never dawned on him, as it did to the linguist Max Black, that metaphors do not bind two entities (e.g., the mind and architecture, or the mind and a landscape) that have objective similarities; often, it is the *metaphor itself* that establishes the similarity. This point is important because it reinforces Breuer's critical suspicion that, if we use a metaphorical expression frequently and unconsciously, we gradually lose cognizance of its metaphorical character. This, arguably, is precisely what occurred to Matta. He so convinced himself that he had discovered a transparent and unprejudiced visual picture of human mentation, that he lost sight of the degree to which that same picture was not only metaphorical, but also predetermined (and thus mediated), at every turn, by his own ideological loyalty to Freud. At this juncture, it is also crucial to mention, if only parenthetically, that, simply because metaphors establish "appropriate" analogies between the physical and psychological that display a certain amount of motivation, the degree of "appropriateness" is not fixed, but may vary from culture to culture, and from mindset to mindset. Had Matta endorsed an alternative view of the psyche, the visual metaphors he would have enlisted to create a visual image of the mind would have been completely different (although his penchant for declaring their truth-value may have stayed the same). Had Matta approached the mind from the perspec-

tive of Zen Buddhism, for example, then the view of the psyche as riffled with repressed thoughts, hidden conflicts, and recessed layers, would have seemed utterly unintelligible to him. For a Zen philosopher like Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, in fact, the mind not only stands as "an indivisible whole and cannot be torn into pieces," but "there are no such things as hidden recesses of mind" (108). Which is not to say that Suzuki's alternative view is any less culturally situated than Freud's, only that one needs to be culturally situated in order to have a view of the mind at all.

And just as different cultures employ different metaphors to express the same concept, different concepts may also be expressed by means of the same metaphor. In Matta's case, the very figures, forms, and shapes previously touted as effective analogues for mental life switched, with remarkable ease, to evoke the social and political problems triggered by the war and its aftermath. Exchanging psychological introspection for the broader social and political issues that bedeviled the post-war world, Matta, around 1944, allowed hybrid figures, half-human, half-machine—in positions of subjugation, sexual coupling, or even torture—to populate the hitherto nebulous expanses of his inscapes, as in *A Grave Situation* (1946 no. 19). The artist explained the change of direction thus: "Suddenly," he remembered, "while trying to do this [looking within himself] I was *being with* a horrible crisis in society. My vision of myself was becoming blind for not being made one with the people about me, and I sought to create a new morphology of others within my own field of consciousness" (Miller 33). Matta even told Max Kozloff: "I had some kind of trauma when I realized what the war was, and the concentration camps, and I went one step further in my understanding. I tried to use, not my personal psychic morphology, but a social morphology. Using the totemic images involved in a situation which was more historical; the torture chambers and so on. I tried to pass from the intimate imagery...to cultural expressions...I was still under the laws of morphology, but this time not so much the forming, let's say, of an organism, which was symbolic of myself, this time it was the formation of cultures fighting each other" (25).

Matta's distinction between his psychic and social formal vocabulary is not always easy to make out, especially in light of the artist's admission to remaining "under the laws of morphology." And in spite of their new mission, the new totemic figures appearing around 1944 can easily be construed as variants of the same hybrid human forms visible in Matta's drawings of the late 1930s and early 1940s (e.g. *Both of You*, no. 3). The facility, in other words, with which the same shapes, or morphology, can be adapted form one purpose (psychological introspection) to another (socio-political awareness) somehow belies the very scientific truth-claims that Matta was continually at pains to make for his own work. From psychological reality to social reality, from brainstorms to political storms, from body neurotic to body politic, the artist moves indiscriminately, all the while using the same forms to explore (with alleged urgency) the crucial issue of the moment. If Matta previously visualized the inner mind as a three-dimensional space, he now portrayed social and political turmoil the same way. "[O]ne must see social space," he was now proclaiming, "and set up a map of social navigations within the ocean of our economy" (Haim 118). His drawings, he professed, were "not landscapes, but socialscapes, or 'econo-comics'" (Arts Council 1984: 1). Perhaps, like Carl Jung, who saw social division as a reflection of psychic division (73); or, like Freud, who modeled interpersonal dynamics on personal dynamics (1921), Matta saw society as the individual writ large, and the individual as society writ small. And although such analogies would have pleased the likes of Jung and Freud, Wittgenstein would no doubt have dismissed them as misleading, although, not for using the outer as a model for the inner this time, but for using the inner as a model for the outer.

Matta, however, betrayed the extreme iconographical plasticity of his morphology most poignantly in his own discussion of the 1984–85 painting *Le fond de la mémoire est rouge* (CGP 259). At first, he reiterated his by-now familiar refrain: "This painting is the image of the inner, mental labyrinth. A conceptual, virtual image that seeks to explode. An inexpressible image of consciousness." From discussing mental processes, however, Matta jumped, indiscriminately and without transition, to matters sexual: "Genetic overflowing, a spermatozoa that managed to get through. I am fascinated by the phenomenon of the frenetic race by millions of sperm that will be reached only by one. The title of the painting could also signify that this sperm, which appears colorless or white at most, is at bottom charged with blood. The painting could be inter-

preted as the landscape where this race takes place, this fraction of a fraction of an instant when fertilization will occur" (Haim 18). To be sure, Matta needs to be commended for his remarkable imagination, and for his ability to create such remarkably flexible schemata. But he simply cannot have it both ways; he cannot claim, on the one hand, that his works are scientific transcriptions of reality, and, on the other, that they can just as easily represent the inner workings of the mind, the social or political conflicts of contemporary culture, or even a sperm's race to fertilize an egg. This diversity testifies to the iconographical range of ideas that may be loosely projected upon his morphology, but it also seriously mitigates Matta's other, basically incompatible, claim: namely, that his art merits scientific status.

Visualizing Thought: Matta and Abstract Expressionism

For the Abstract Expressionists, the potential of Matta's work to accommodate multiple interpretations was hardly to be held against him, although remarks about spermatozoa's ability to symbolize consciousness and mental processes might have raised an eyebrow or two. What was objectionable, rather, was Matta's over-reliance on preconceived Freudian ideas, and, worse, on outmoded visual props to represent them. From the Americans' perspective, Matta was illustrating psychological concepts rather than inventing new pictorial modes of representation. Peter Busa admitted that being considered an illustrator was just about the worst thing one could say of an artist at the time: "We knew that Dalí was a kind of illustrator. The dirtiest word you could call an artist then was an 'illustrator.' We considered Dalí an illustrator without plastic consciousness. That is why most of us dismissed Dalí as an influence" (Simon 18). Pollock concurred: "the modern artist," he declared, is "expressing his feelings rather than illustrating" (O'Connor 4: 250). On this account, one may conjecture that the illustrative bent in Matta's work (as well as his over-confidence in having disclosed a literal image of the mind) undermined his esteem among the younger Americans far more powerfully than his evocation of three-dimensional space. For many of the Abstract Expressionists, and for Motherwell in particular, creating a powerful new pictorial language meant following the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's dictum: "paint not the thing, but the *effect* of the thing." From this perspective, Matta's over-reliance upon architectural or landscape metaphors tied the evocation of incorporeal thoughts and emotions too closely to the depiction of a literal object. However metaphorical Matta's construction of meaning proved to be, his inclinations were arguably moving closer to similes than to metaphors: for Matta, after all, the mind was like a landscape, or the mind was like an architectural structure ("The world," he once said, "looks more and more like a pear" [Ferrari 1987: 216]). The Abstract Expressionists, on the other hand, sought to convey disembodied emotions such as tension, conflict, energy, or anxiety by means of a new, more abstract pictorial language, one that proved no less physical, but that, along the lines laid down by Mallarmé, would simulate not the thing, but the effect of the thing. There is an important difference here. The Abstract Expressionists' mandate to express subjectivity by abstract means not only required the relinquishing of intermediary visual props; it also meant that, for all intents and purposes, these artists thought of themselves as painters first. Matta, conversely, always denied being a painter, preferring less orthodox terms such as "mental architect" or "geographer of human relations" (Haim 63).

On this point, it is also significant to mention that Motherwell was suspicious of the Surrealists' attempt to elicit repressed aspects of the unconscious in their work. His reservations even compelled him to substitute "plastic automatism" for their term "psychic automatism," which, when employed by modern painters like Masson, Miró, and Picasso, Motherwell observed, "is actually very little a question of the unconscious. It is much more a plastic weapon with which to invent new forms" (Miller 31). Motherwell's shift of terminology reflects the attitude of one who, again unlike Matta, thinks of himself as an artist first; and his doubts over the legitimacy of "psychic" automatism, coupled with the Abstract Expressionists' general aversion to "illustration," nearly guaranteed that Matta and the young Americans would move on a collision course. In keeping with Surrealist practice, moreover, Matta kept encouraging the Abstract Expressionists to hallucinate on the basis of the improvisatory stains or impulsive marks they were making (just as Leonardo had encouraged painters to do centuries before). For any faithful Freudian, however, no gesture or stain, no matter how spontaneous or accidental, was psychologically irrel-

Fig. 10
Robert Motherwell, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, 1961, oil on canvas, 69 x 114 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Anonymous gift, 1965.

evant. Either the artist's emotions invariably inflected his or her most minute physical movements during the act of creation; or, even more importantly, these emotions would powerfully intervene—as in a Roscharch test—to guide the emergence of certain forms and themes throughout the artistic process. These projections (or "hallucinations" as Matta called them) were thus deemed indispensable to any secondary revisions the artist would later pursue upon the canvas; in their absence, the emotional yield of a work of art would be severely curtailed, or so Matta and the Surrealists believed.

The Americans, however, were resistant to engage in this secondary stage, a reluctance that accounts, if only partially, for Matta's claim to have been misunderstood. "Come on Matta, come on!" (Haim 89), Matta remembers the young Abstract Expressionists saying to him. Perhaps they felt that Matta's highfalutin statements lacked a certain aesthetic earnestness or intellectual rigor; indeed, Arthur Danto recalled that although Motherwell was frequently amenable to discussing his personal experiences with the Surrealists, he showed more interest in their engaging personalities than in their theories and doctrines (39). And like Wittgenstein, Motherwell and the Abstract Expressionists may have found any professing to having visualized the mind, or to having made the "invisible visible," to be epistemologically naïve at best, and seriously misguided at worst. If Matta thought he had failed to exert influence upon the younger Americans (because they "never understood each other," or because the "only thing they grasped was the freedom of the gesture" [Haim 47]), it is probably because the Abstract Expressionists judged Matta's reasoning to be fundamentally flawed. "I spoke of morphology...to the Americans," Matta recalled, "but all they absorbed was the way I started. I started from a stain that looked like a flow" (Haim 47).

This does not mean, however, that Motherwell and the Abstract Expressionists did not share Matta's fascination with approximating the workings of the human mind (Motherwell was already cited above as having remarked that one of the major tasks that "modern art set for itself was to find a language that would be closer to the structure of the human mind"). But their approach was strikingly different. If Matta's strategy was to visualize thought by positing an analogy between, say, emotions and some other entity in the external world—consider, for instance, his statement that "Our anxieties are nebulae" (Haim 118)—the alternative strategy favored by Motherwell and the Abstract Expressionists was to formulate a mode of representation that visualized the very *structure* (rather than the appearance) of thinking. For Motherwell, it was the way the mind *works*, not how it looks, that mattered. His mature paintings, such as the *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series (fig. 10), are organized around blatant contrasts between black and white, or between ovoid and strictly rectangular shapes. And although other Abstract Expressionists such as Gottlieb (fig. 11), Rothko (fig. 12), and Kline (fig. 13) employed widely different visual formulae, it is easy to discern how their paintings also operate by exacerbating oppositions and contrasts among the rather limited formal means at their disposal: dark versus light hues, top versus bottom areas, thrusts versus counter-thrusts, implosions versus explosions, and so on.

This formal strategy was highly deliberate. While Gottlieb saw his works as embodying mental conflict—"There has to be some sort of conflict," he declared, "If there's no conflict and the resolution of some sort of opposites, there's no tension and everything is rather meaningless" (Siegel 31)—Motherwell manipulated the contrasts in his *Elegies* to evoke the opposition between "life and death"

(Carmean 101). For his part, Rothko felt that antitheses were neither synthesized nor neutralized in his work, only "held in momentary stasis" (Seitz 102). Although some may argue that the exploitation of contrast betrays nothing more than the Abstract Expressionists' predilection for a specific compositional device, the artists themselves firmly believed that this strategy not only imbued abstract art with meaning, but that it also implied a tacit recognition, as Motherwell put it, that meaning was not "in" the elements themselves, but a "product of the relation *between* elements" (Carmean 103). Hans Hofmann expressed the very same idea by insisting that a "thing in itself never expresses anything. It is the relation between things that gives meaning to them" (39). The very view that the construction of meaning hinges upon the relationship between elements (i.e., from their differences rather than from their inherent properties) has, of course, been a mainstay of structuralist thought ever since the linguistic courses of Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. This point is relevant here because the assumption that signification in language and other modes of social organization is predicated upon the establishment of an arbitrary system of differences and oppositions (rather than upon intrinsic, natural meanings) was not, for the structuralists, a trivial coincidence. On the contrary, if the construction of meaning across cultures and across multiple modes of communication (e.g., language, art, table manners, fashion, social rituals, etc.) follows this basic postulate, then the structuralists reasoned that our inclination to process and articulate information by means of opposition revealed that human beings have an innate proclivity to understand any entity, say A, only because it is different from another entity, say B, and to understand that the relationship between A and B is somehow equivalent to that between –A and –B. According to the structuralists, in other words, the tendency to organize information around oppositions betrayed nothing less than a basic and pervasive operation of the human mind.

Fig. 11.
Adolph Gottlieb, *Thrust*, 1959, oil on canvas, 108 x 90 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. George A. Hearn Fund, 1959.

Whether the Abstract Expressionists were conversant or even aware of the basic tenets of structuralism, as some scholars have alleged, remains an open question. But even without cognizance of the key principles of structuralism, it would not have taken much for the Abstract Expressionists to arrive, if only intuitively, at similar conclusions. Their deliberate exploitation of formal differences and oppositions, and their references to the way "tension," "contrast," and "antitheses" are evidenced in their works, testifies to the strong parallel between Abstract Expressionist formal

solutions and structuralist ideas. What is more, their view that meaning is the product, not of the elements themselves, but of the relationships *between* elements, and their own aspiration to create a visual language that would reflect the structure of thought, also reveals crucial affinities. With the advent of deconstruction, however, it cannot be denied that, for some time now, structuralism has fallen out of favor among scholars in the humanities. But although structuralism has received severe criticisms at the hand of post-structuralists for its overly reductive strategy of distilling *all* human thought and cultural manifestations to the establishment of binary oppositions, a certain amount of evidence has surfaced to corroborate the idea that the human mind does operate by imposing binary oppositions upon phenomena. In studying languages with very few adjectives, for example, comparative linguists have found that, in the majority of cases, these adjectives group very easily into opposites (large versus small, strong versus weak, light versus dark, etc.; Dixon 56). And in studying how human beings categorize, contemporary cognitive psychologists have argued that human beings often construe categories as if they were maximally distinct: in other words, we have a strong propensity to ignore differences among, but to exaggerate differences across, categories. In effect, what categories reveal about the mind, according to contemporary cognitians, is that human beings have a marked inclination to adopt an "us versus them" attitude (Lakoff 52).

Unlike the structuralists, however, present-day cognitive psychologists do not tend to reduce all human mental and cultural operations to the setting up of binary oppositions (and although some of the additional conceptual strategies they have identified as reflective of human mental operations also strike compelling parallels with other Abstract Expressionist compositional formulae, this issue lies beyond the purview of this essay). The parallels between structuralist dictates and Abstract Expressionist compositional strategies are thus highly significant for our purposes because they help clarify how the Abstract Expressionists sought "to find a language that would be closer to the structure of the human mind," and, no less importantly, because they allow the differences between Matta's approach and that of the Americans to emerge in sharper relief. In their attempt to invent a new language that would approximate the structure of mental operations, the members of the New York School were led to reject Matta's predilection to compare the mind to landscapes or architectural structures. This divergence explains why Matta's continual references to the "science" of how things in the world change and evolve was ultimately of scant interest to them, and, equally importantly, why the cleavage that formed between them and Matta cannot be persuasively explained by the Abstract Expressionists' objection to evocations of three-dimensional space (Rubin), or by their alleged lack of interest in meaning (Matta).

Fig. 12
Mark Rothko, *Untitled* (Black and Grey), 1970, synthetic polymer on canvas, 72 x 66 1/4 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc. (c) 1996 Kate Rothko-Prizel & Christopher Rothko/Artist's Rights Society, New York.

For the Abstract Expressionists, moreover, any aesthetic strategy susceptible to coming closer to the structure—rather than the appearance—of human thought required an extreme simplification of its formal language. As Motherwell put it: "We modern artists have no generally accepted subject matter, no inherited iconography. But to re-invent painting, its subject-matter, and its means, is a task so difficult that one must reduce it to a very simple concept" (Tuchman 34). Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman expressed it even more succinctly: "We favor the simple expression of the complex thought" (Gottlieb and Rothko 9). Given these statements, it is understandable that the Abstract Expressionists would steer away from the increasing visual complexity and busyness of Matta's work, irrespective of its suggestions of three-dimensionality. As their quest for an original, more elemental form of abstraction put them at odds with their would-be mentor, it was ultimately around questions of meaning, and how meaning should be represented in art, rather than around questions of pictorial space that their pivotal disagreements revolved. Like Matta, the young Americans sought to visualize thought, but, like Mallarmé, they sought its major effects, how it structures the basic aspects of our experience, not its empirical appearance. Since visual simplification was a means of reaching this objective, architecture or landscape similes, references to spermatozoa or nebulae, and all the pseudo-scientific verbiage Matta wielded under the rubric of morphology, lost their aesthetic appeal and conceptual usefulness for the Abstract Expressionists. Matta's claims to having divined the hidden recesses of the mind and to having made the "invisible visible," however, may have been most objectionable of all; these played well in some artistic circles, but, to the young Americans, they may have proved more of a mind game than a mindscape.

Fig. 13
Franz Kline, *Mahoning*, 1956, oil and paper collage on canvas, 80 x 100 in. Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase, with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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*CGP and page number is used as an abbreviated notation for the exhibition catalogue, *Matta* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1985).

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Contributors to the Catalogue

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Claude Cernuschi received his M.A. and Ph.D degrees from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He has taught at Hunter College, New York University, Duke University, and is presently Associate Professor of the history of modern art at Boston College. He is the author of *Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance* (1992), *Jackson Pollock: "Psychoanalytic" Drawings* (1992), *"Not an Illustration but the Equivalent": A Cognitive Approach to Abstract Expressionism* (1997), and *Re/Casting Kokoschka: Ethics and Aesthetics, Epistemology and Politics in Fin-de-Siecle Vienna* (2002). He is also a contributor to the catalogs *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists* (1997), *Edvard Munch: Psyche, Symbol, and Expression* (2001), and *Oskar Kokoschka: Early Portraits from Vienna and Berlin* (2002).

Mary Schneider Enriquez is an Independent Curator and Art Critic who specializes in Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art. She earned both her B.A. and M.A. degrees in art history at Harvard University. Enriquez serves as Latin American Art Consultant for the Harvard University Art Museums and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard. In 2000–01 she co-curated the exhibition "Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection" at the Harvard Art Museums. She curated a traveling retrospective of contemporary Mexican multi-media artist Gerardo Suter and in 1994–5, she co-curated the exhibition "Mexico: A Landscape Revisited" with the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service that toured five museums within the U.S. and Mexico. Enriquez has served as the Latin American Correspondent for *ARTnews* Magazine, contributed reviews to *Art In America* Magazine, and has written criticism for *Art Nexus* Magazine. She has written numerous essays for museum and gallery exhibition catalogues.

Elizabeth T. Goizueta has a B.A. in Spanish and Economics and an M.A. in Spanish Linguistics from the University of Georgia. She received a scholarship to the University of Salamanca, where she undertook additional graduate studies. Upon returning to the United States, Goizueta was certified to work in Immigration Law, becoming the co-Director of the Amnesty program of Catholic Social Services in Atlanta. Since

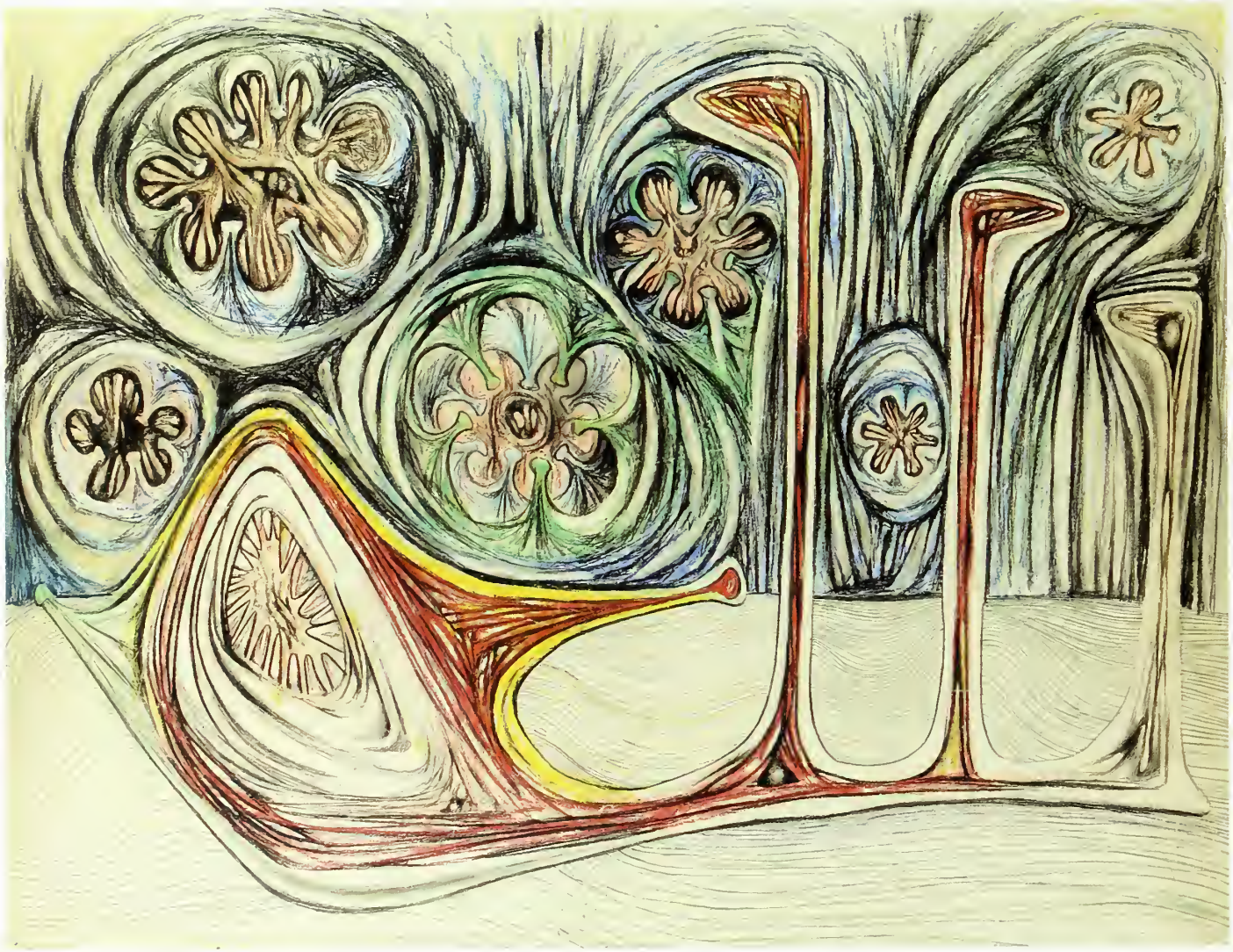
1993, Goizueta has taught at Loyola University in Chicago and Boston College. She has collaborated on numerous academic projects and is currently teaching a special section of "Naturalmente," a course for students interested in exploring Hispanic literature through Latin American contexts of immigration and politics.

Roberto S. Goizueta is Professor of Theology at Boston College. He is President Elect of the Catholic Theological Society of America and a past President of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States. Dr. Goizueta received his B.A. from Yale University, his M.A. and Ph.D. from Marquette University, and a Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, from the University of San Francisco. *The National Catholic Reporter* has named him one of the ten most influential Hispanic American educators, pastors, and theologians. His book *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* received a Catholic Press Association Book Award.

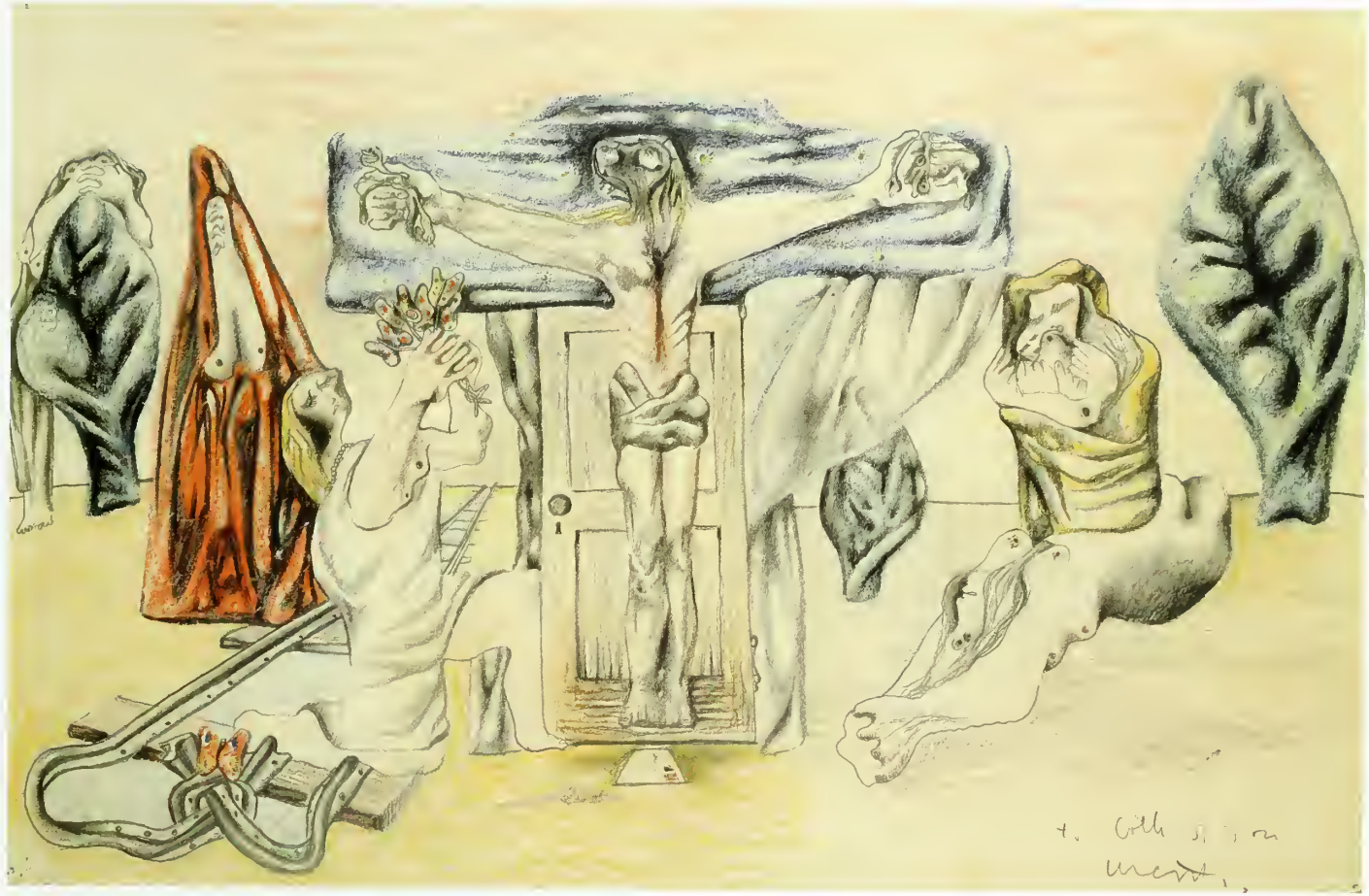
Works in the Exhibition

No. 1

Horoscope, 1937, Graphite and crayon on paper, 12 3/4 x 19 3/4 in., Lindy and Edwin Bergman Collection



No. 2
Untitled, 1937, Colored crayon, 19 5/8 x 25 5/8 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA



No. 3

Both of You, 1938, Colored crayon on paper, 12 3/8 x 19 1/4 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA

No. 4
Morphology of Desire, 1938, Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 36 1/4 in., Abraham and Judith Amar Foundation of Art

No. 5

Untitled, 1938, Colored crayon on paper, 19 1/2 x 25 1/2 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA

No. 6

Psychology of Morphology, 1939, Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA

No. 7

Untitled, 1940, Oil on canvas, 10 1/2 x 8 3/4 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA

No. 8

War of Nerves, 1940, Pencil, colored pencil, and crayon on paper, 15 x 22 in., Private Collection, Chicago, IL

No. 9

Woman Playing Ball in Front of the Volcano, 1940, Colored pencil and graphite on paper, 11 x 15 in., Courtesy of Acquavella Galleries Inc., New York

No. 10

Children's Fear of Idols, 1943, Oil on canvas, 21 1/8 x 26 1/8 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

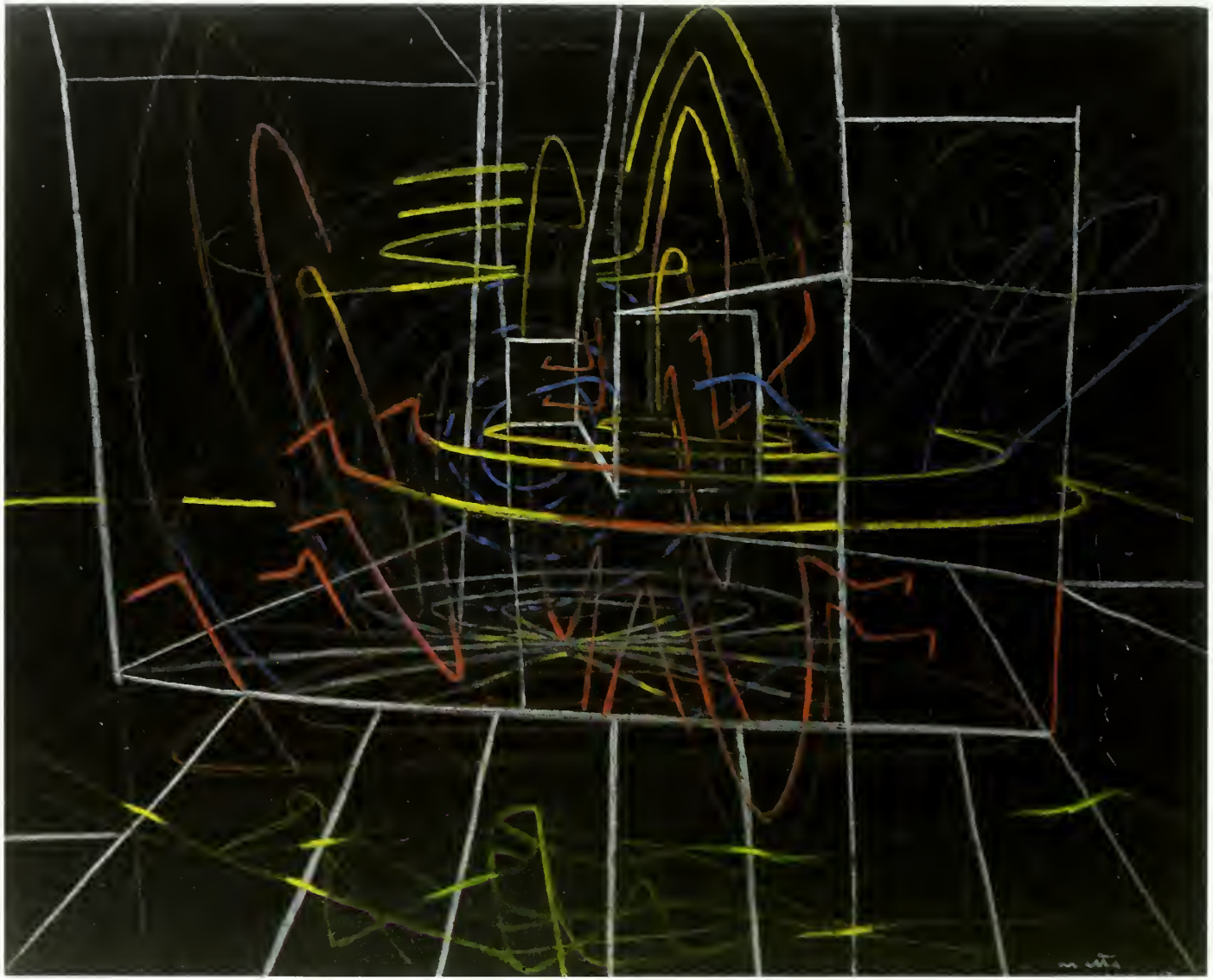
No. 11

Inscape, 1943, Oil on canvas, 21 1/8 x 26 1/8 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 12
La Sodomie (Seul ou en Bande), 1944, Colored pencil and watercolor on paper, 22 1/2 x 28 2/3 in., Haim Chanin Fine Arts, New York

No. 13

La Révolte des Contraires, 1944, Oil on canvas, 38 x 51 in., Galeria Ramis Barquet, New York and J. Todd Figi



No. 14

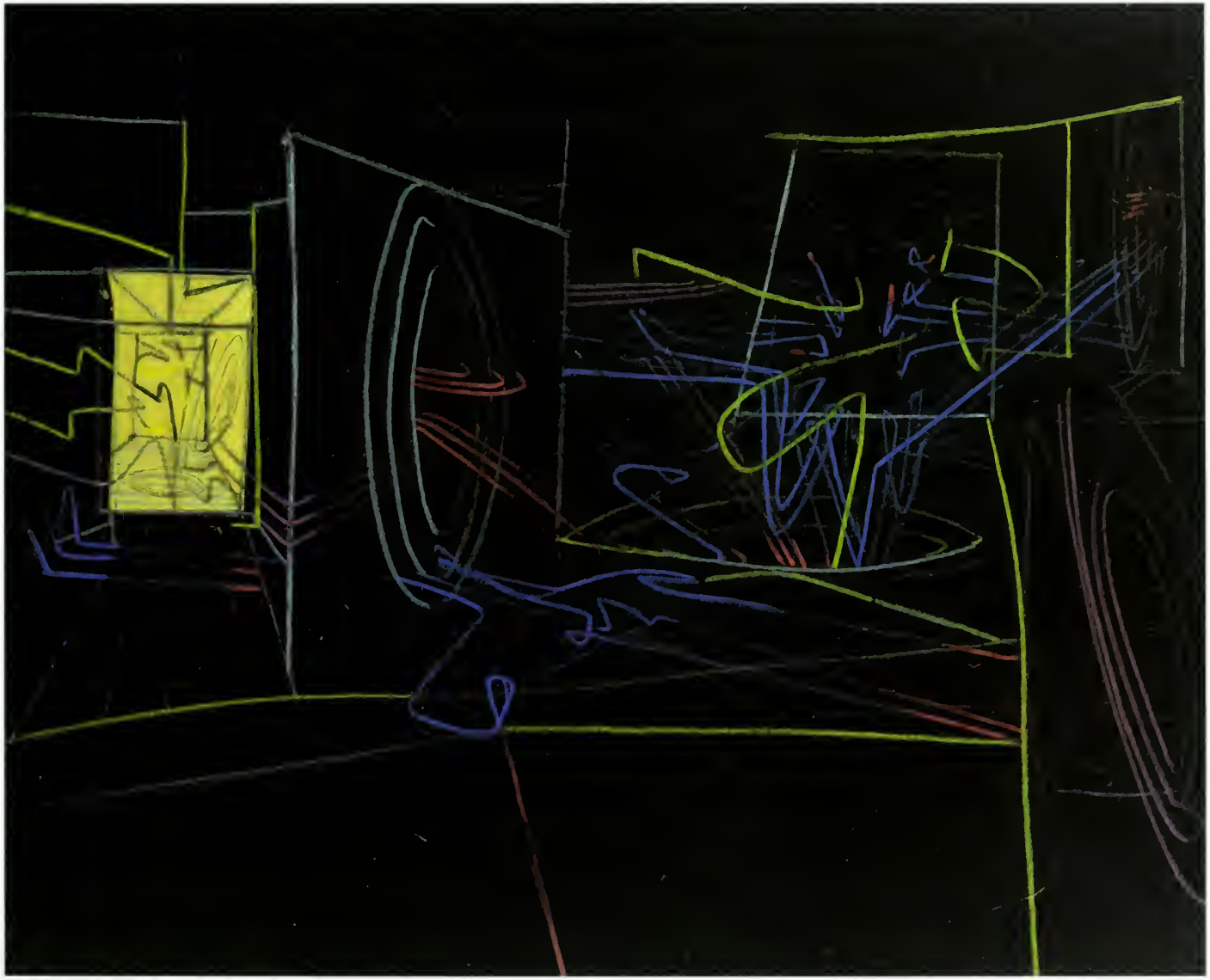
Untitled, 1944, Wax crayon and lead pencil on paper, 9 3/4 x 12 in., Haim Chanin Fine Arts, New York

No. 15

La Femme Affamée, 1945, Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA

No. 16

The Remainer, 1945, Oil on canvas, 44 x 32 in., Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design; Nancy Sayles Day Fund

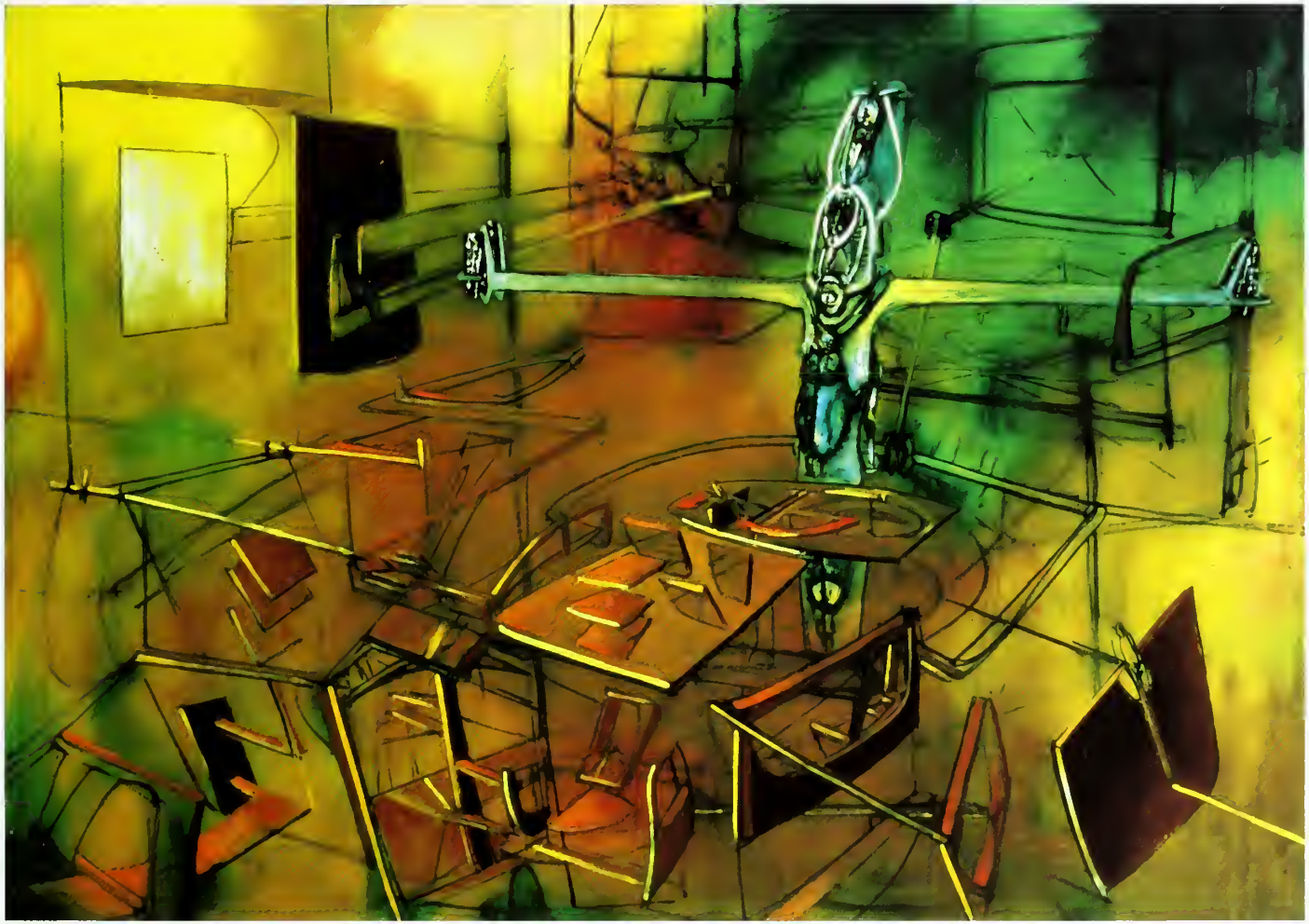


No. 17

Untitled, 1945, Colored pastel on black construction paper, with additional collage element of small pencil drawing, 9 5/8 x 11 7/8 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA

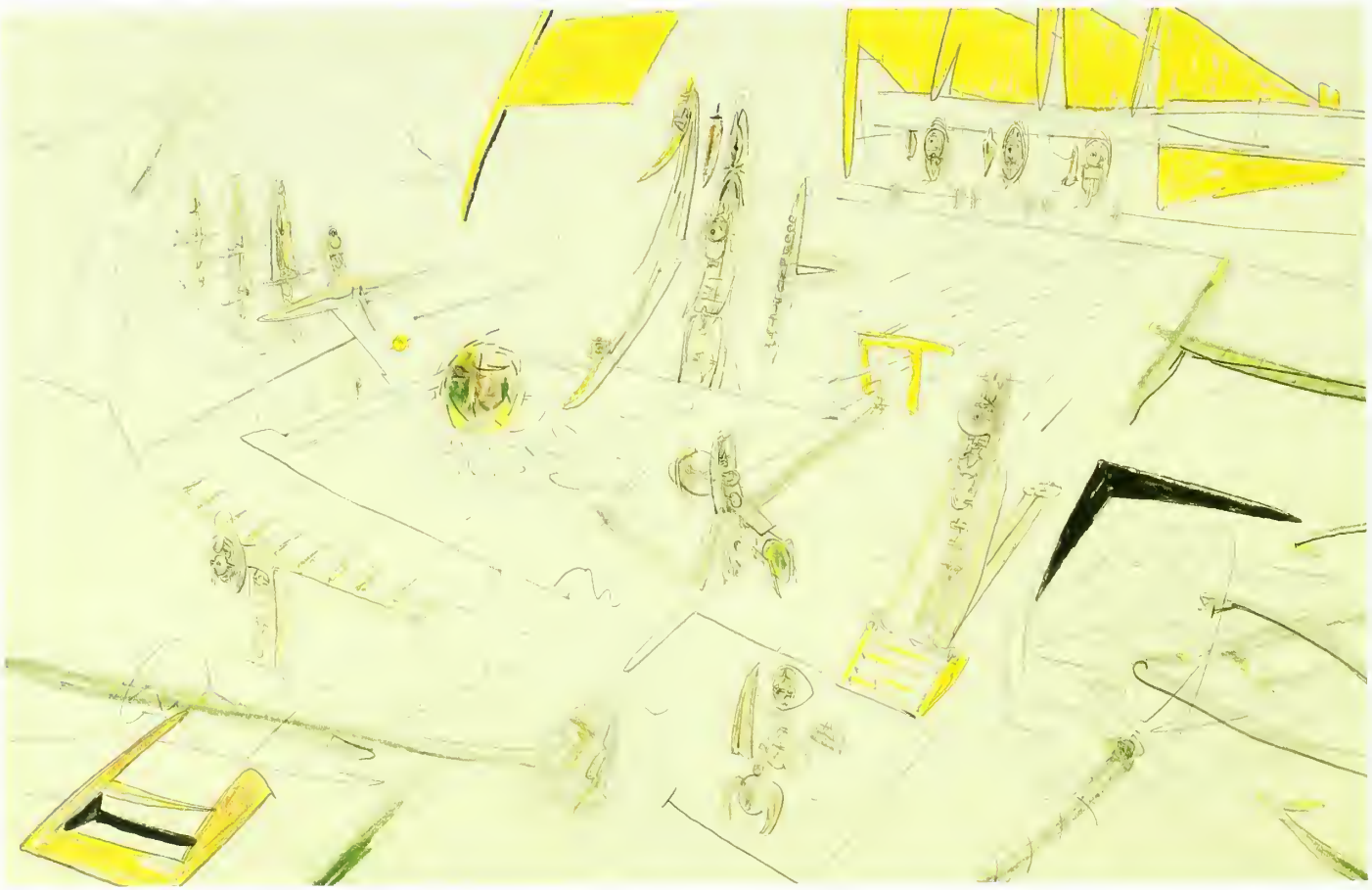
No. 18

Untitled, 1945, Colored pastel on black construction paper, 9 5/8 x 11 7/8 in., J. Todd Figi, La Jolla, CA



No. 19

A Grave Situation, 1946, Oil on canvas, 55 x 77 1/8 in., Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Gift of the Mary and Earle Ludgin Collection

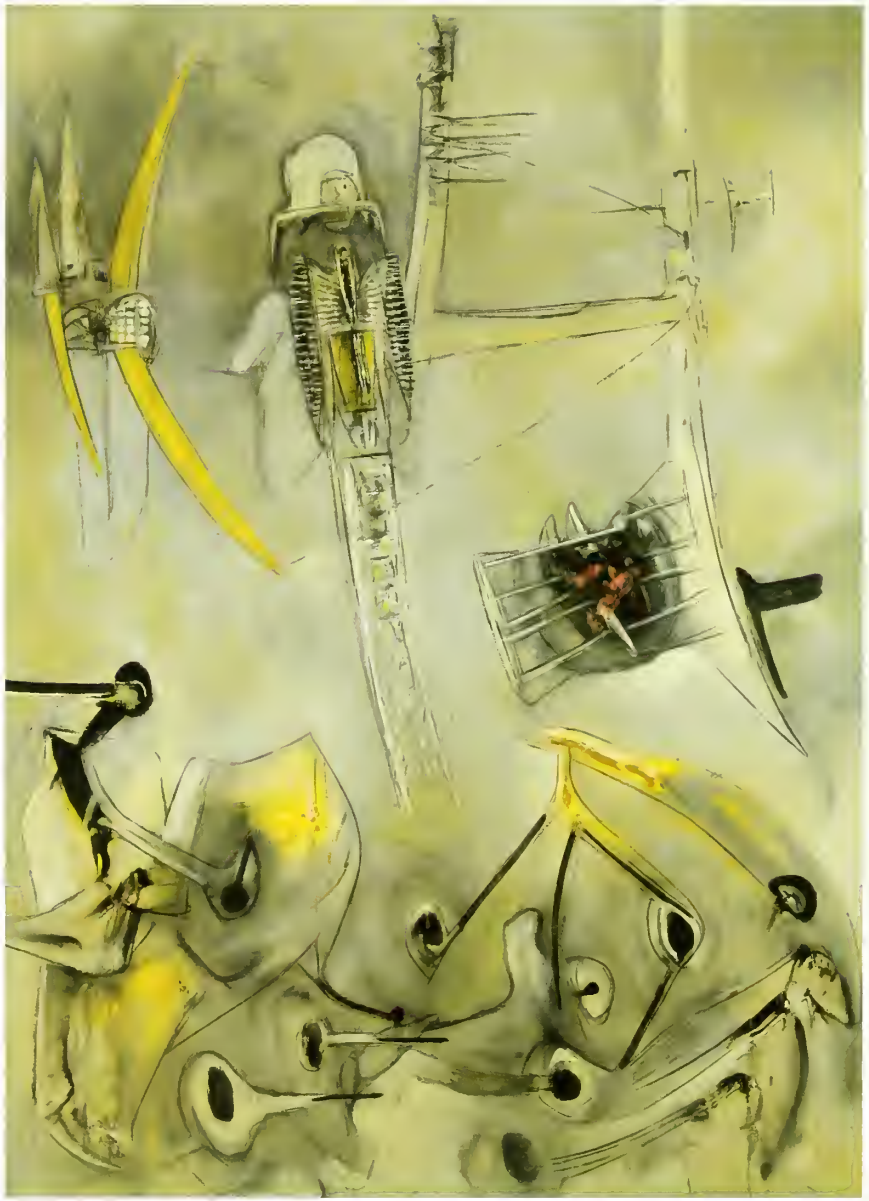


No. 20

Study for How-Ever, 1947, Graphite and crayon on paper, 13 x 20 1/8 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 21

Abstraction, ca. 1948, Oil on paper, 57 x 74 1/2 in., Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design; Gift of Mrs. Peggy Guggenheim



No. 22

Je M'arche, 1949, Oil on canvas, 76 1/4 x 55 in., The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago; Gift of Lindy and Edwin Bergman

No. 23

Philanthropic Assassin, 1951, Charcoal and pastel on paper laid down on canvas, 59 1/2 x 39 1/2 in., Abraham and Judith Amar Foundation of Art

No. 24

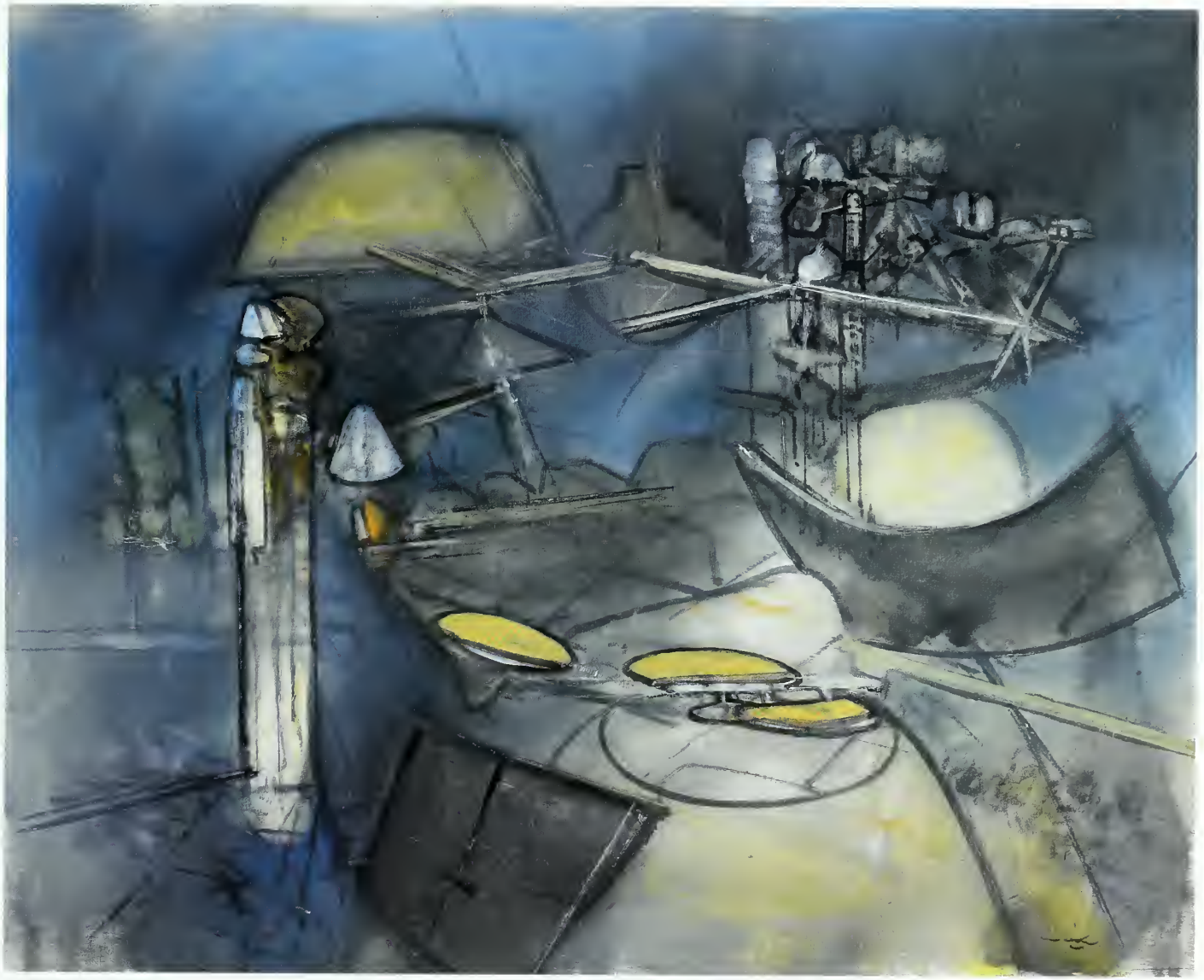
Alba, 1953, Oil on canvas, 39 1/5 x 48 3/4 in., Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lester H. Dana, Boston

No. 25

Be Born of Water, 1954, Oil on canvas, 32 x 39 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

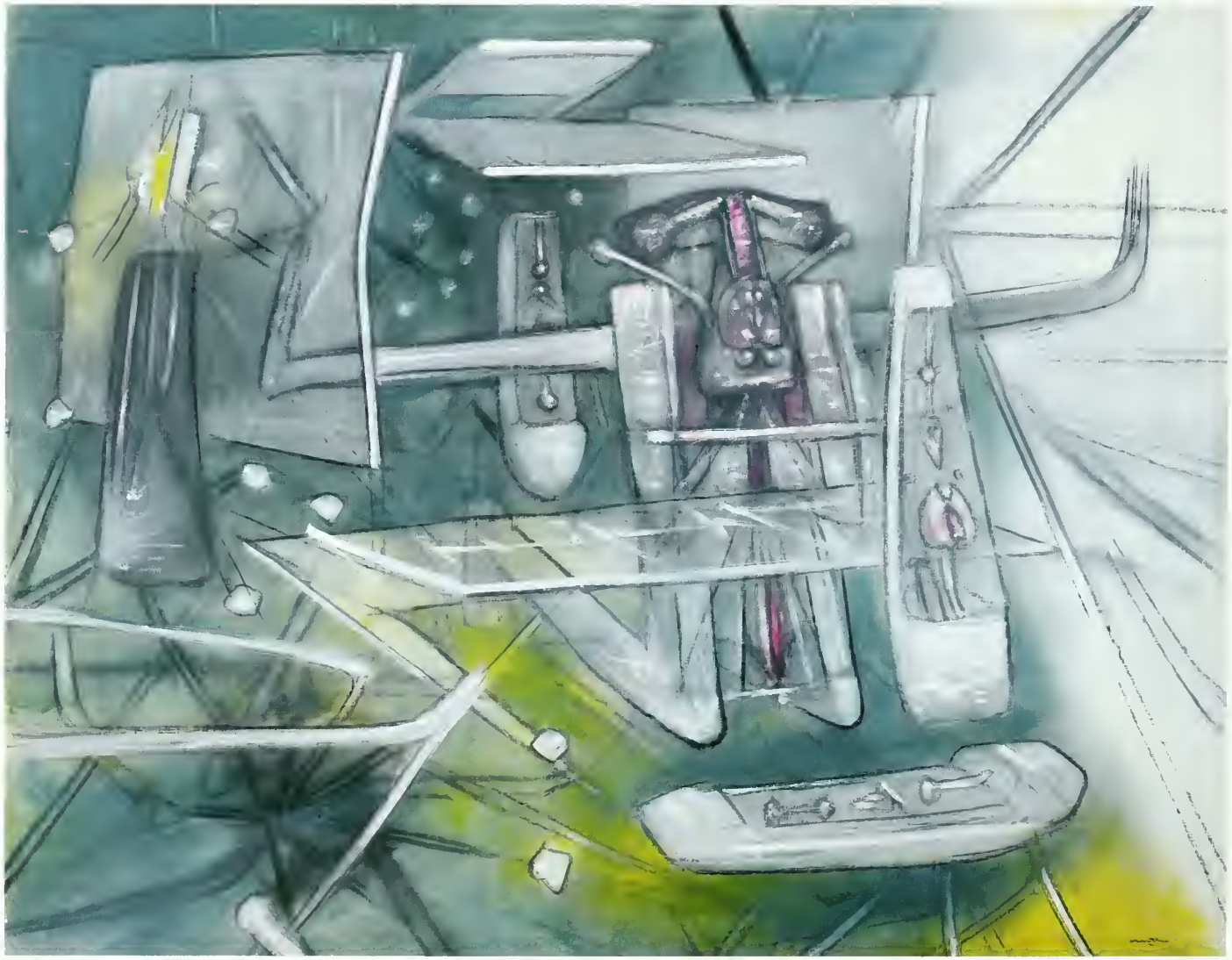
No. 26

The Chess Player, 1954, Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 32 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL



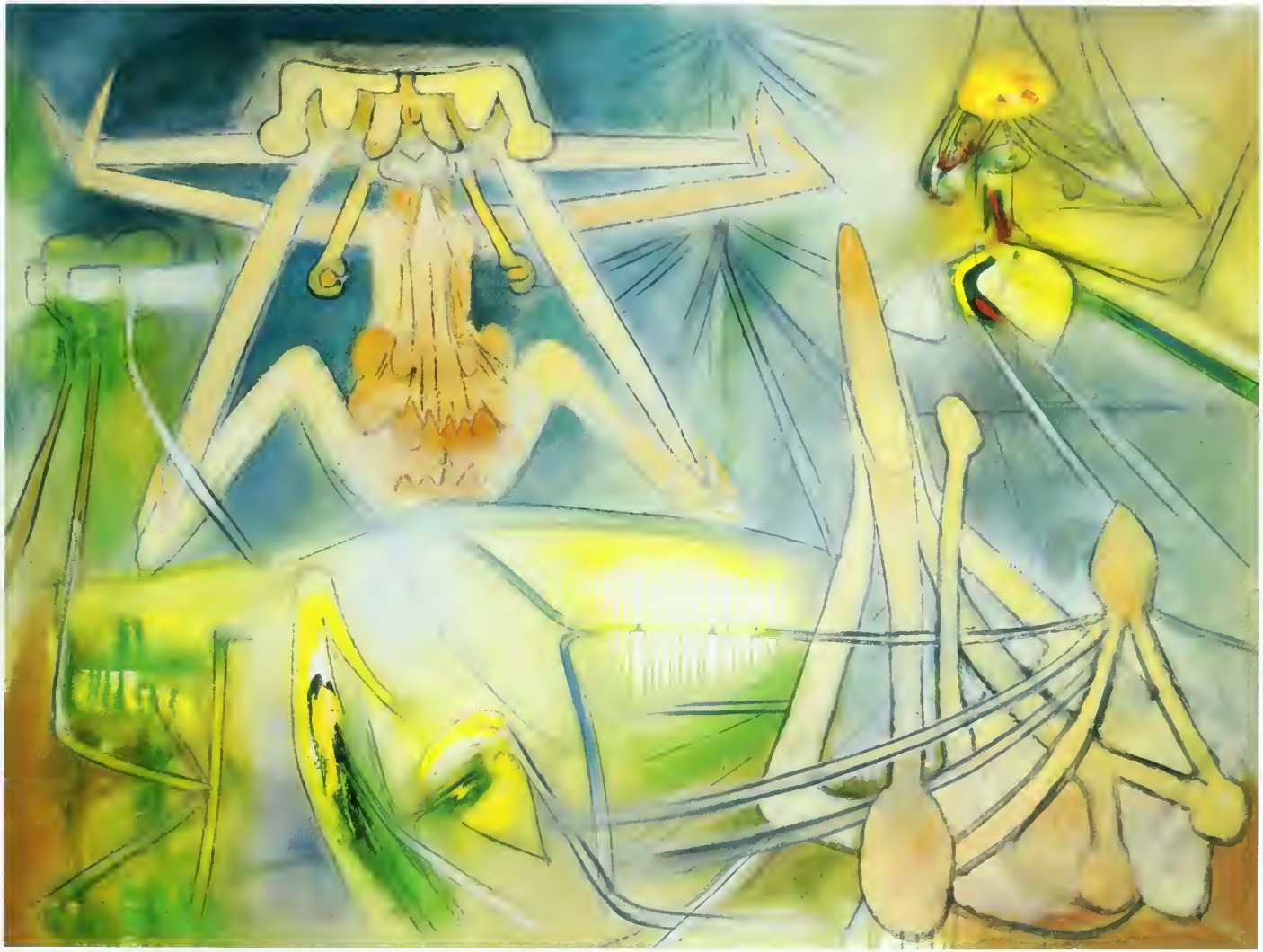
No. 27

Composition, ca. 1954, Oil on canvas, 32 x 40 in., Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur B. Kern



No. 28

L'engin dans l'éminence, 1955, Oil on canvas, 45 x 57 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL



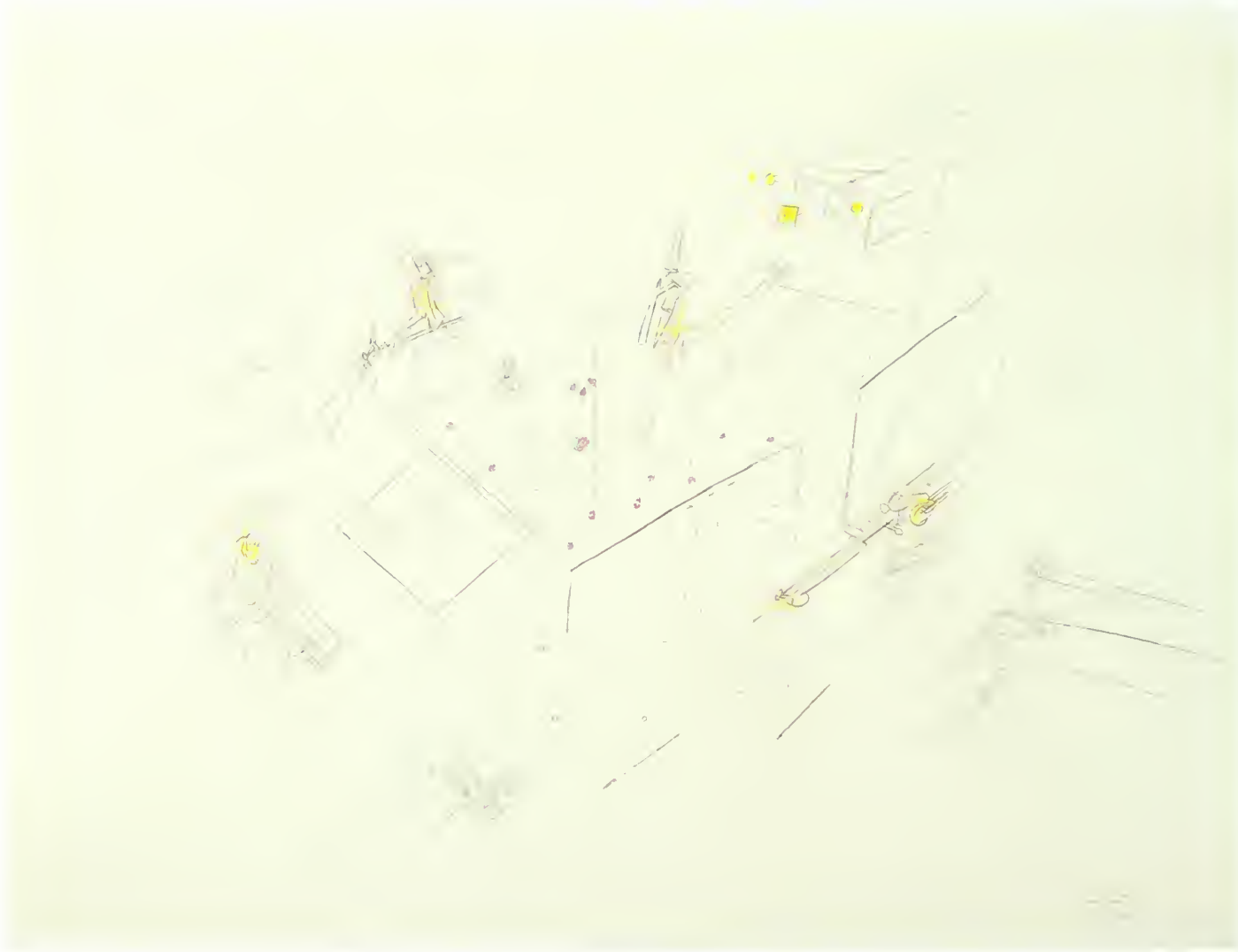
No. 29

Threshold of Love, 1955, Oil on canvas, 45 3/4 x 59 in., Collection of Rock J. Walker, San Diego

No. 30
Heart Malitte, 1955, Oil on canvas, 45 x 57 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

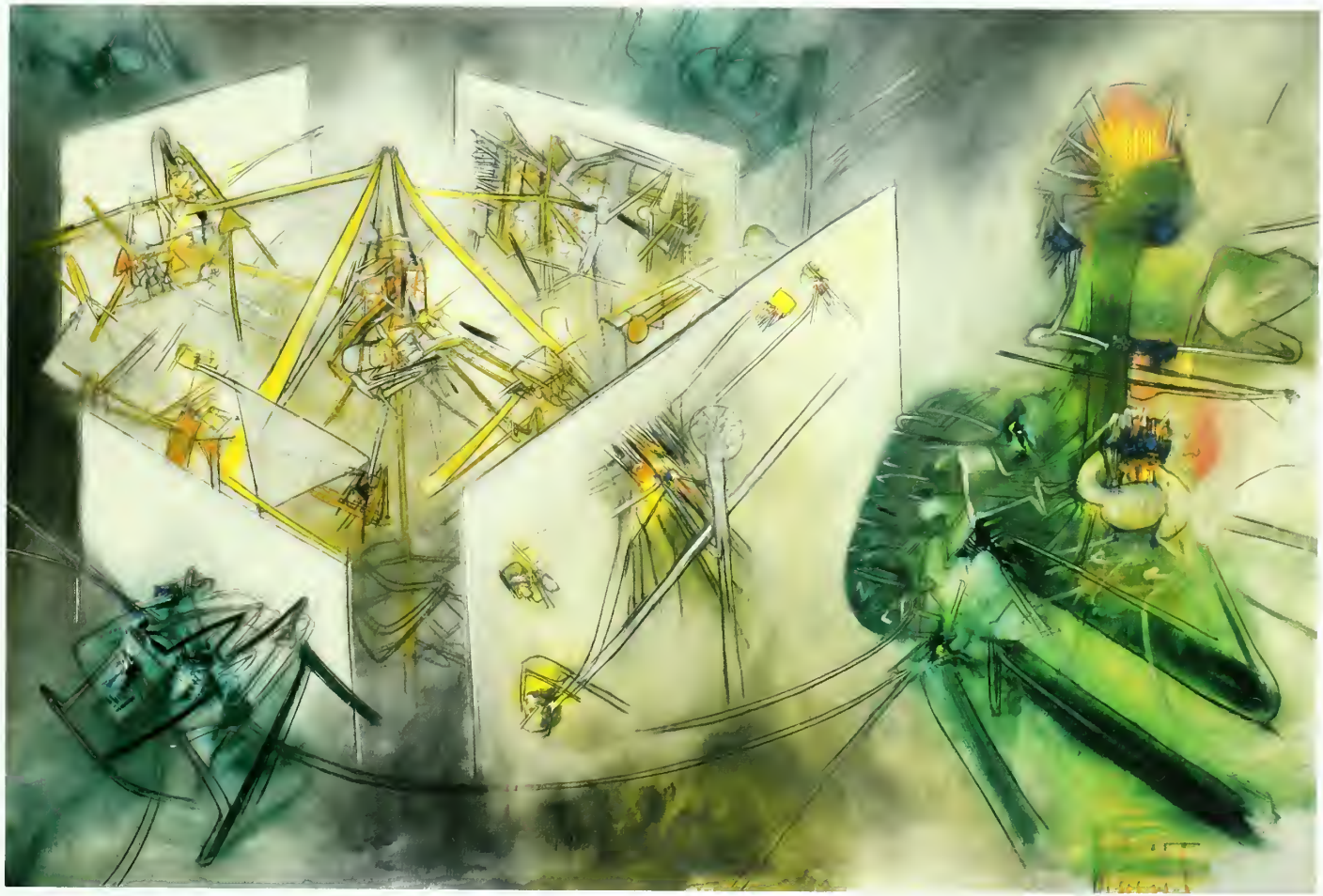
No. 31

La Démonstration, 1957, Oil on canvas, 32 x 39 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL



No. 32

Phénomène de la conscience émue, 1957, Pencil and crayon on paper, 19 5/8 x 26 3/4 in., Collection of Christine Gilberti, Chicago, IL



No. 33

The Unthinkable, 1957, Oil on canvas, 78 x 118 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 34

D'amour Chargée, 1958, Oil on canvas, 23 3/4 x 29 3/4 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 35

La Terre devant, 1958, Pencil and crayon on paper, 19 3/4 x 25 3/4 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 36

Espace de l'espece, 1959, Pencil and crayon on paper, 19 1/2 x 25 in., Collection of Christine Gilberti, Chicago, IL

No. 37

Les Chemins d'ici, 1959, Oil on canvas, 23 1/2 x 28 1/2 in., Collection of Christine Gilberti, Chicago, IL

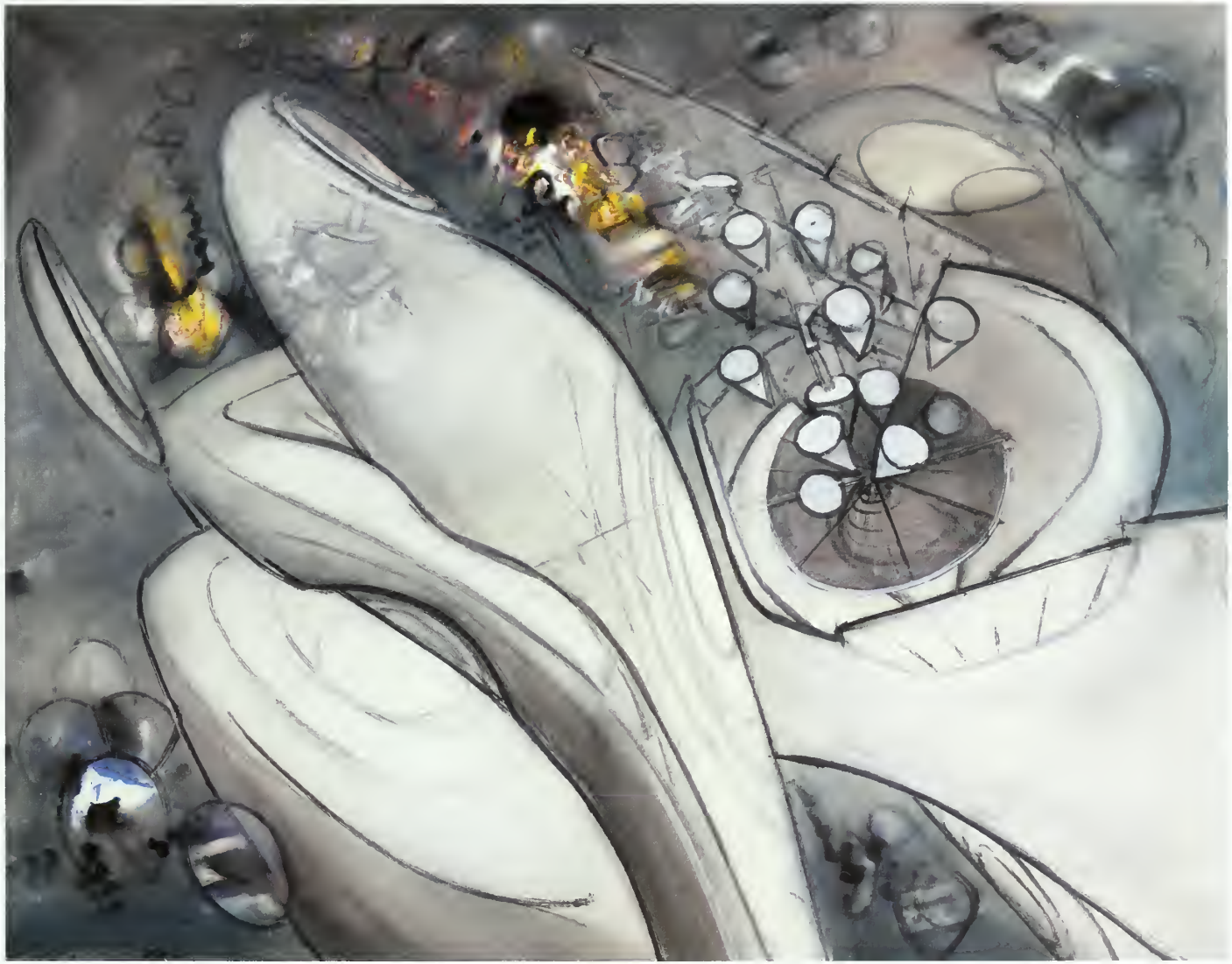
No. 38

The Clan, 1959, Bronze, 21 x 26 1/2 x 28 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 39
Couple III, 1959-60, Bronze, 29 in., Private collection

No. 40

Untitled, 1965, Pastel, crayon and pencil on paper, 19 5/8 x 25 5/8 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL



No. 41

Eve Veille, 1965-66, Oil on canvas, 45 x 57 1/2 in., Private collection, New York

No. 42

Design of Intention, c. 1970, Steel wire, wood and plastic, 29 x 13 x 9 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 43

Le Monde d'un Jour, 1970, Oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 25 1/2 in., Jim Winter, Delafield, WI

No. 44

Lover's Quarrel, 1970, Oil on canvas, 58 x 45 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 45

Upheaval of One's Ocean, 1972, Oil on canvas, 34 1/2 x 35 1/2 in., Collection of Mark and Carol Symons, Chicago, IL

No. 46

L'éclat d'exiles, 1974, Oil on canvas, 44 1/4 x 52 3/4 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 47

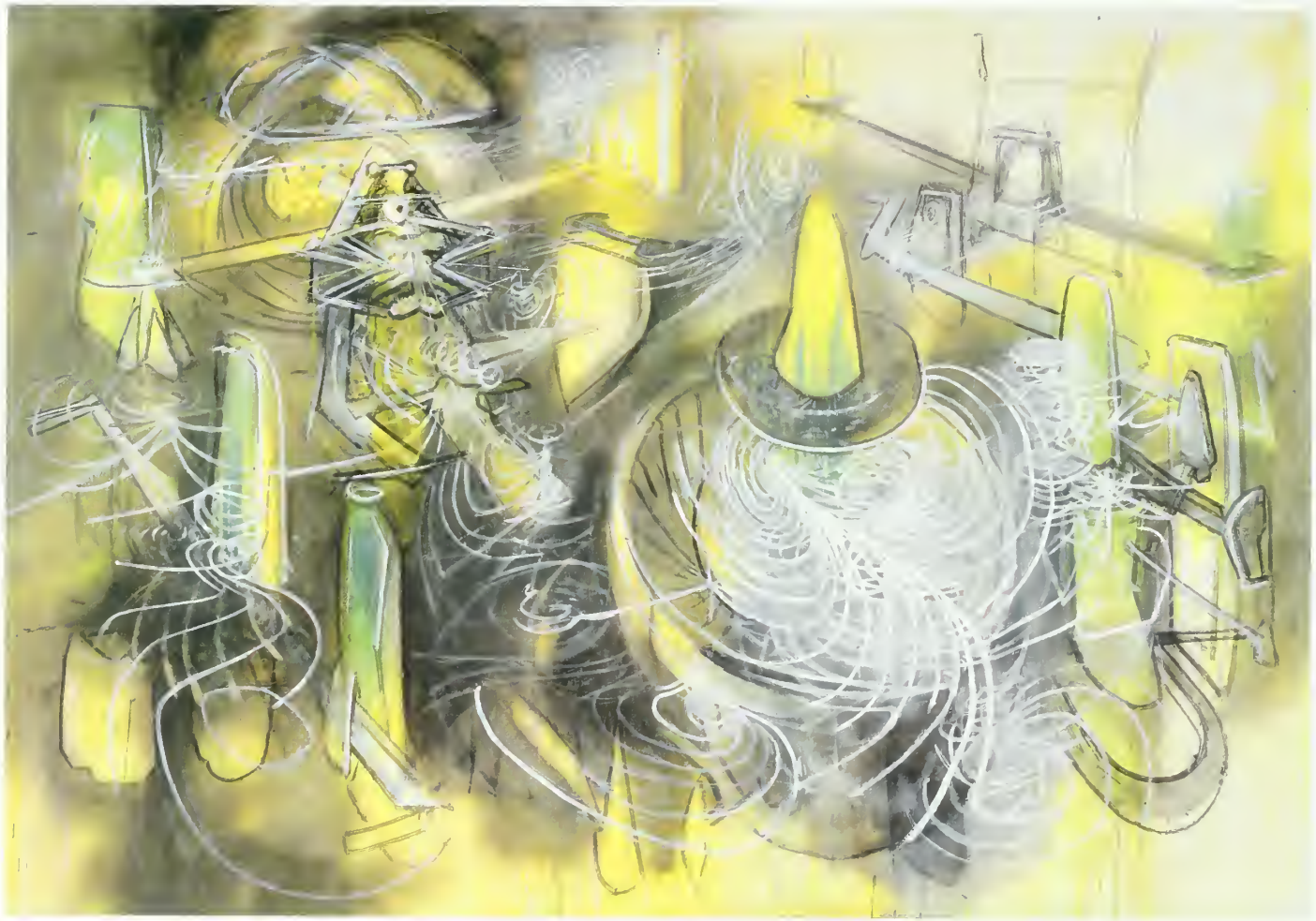
Heart Throb, 1976, Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 37 1/2 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 48

Rooming Life, 1977, Oil on canvas, 78 x 118 in. Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 49

Art Cadia, 1982, Oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 24 in., Private Collection



No. 50

Ils Sexplose, 1982, Oil on canvas, 78 x 118 in., Collection of Thomas R. Monahan, Chicago, IL

No. 51

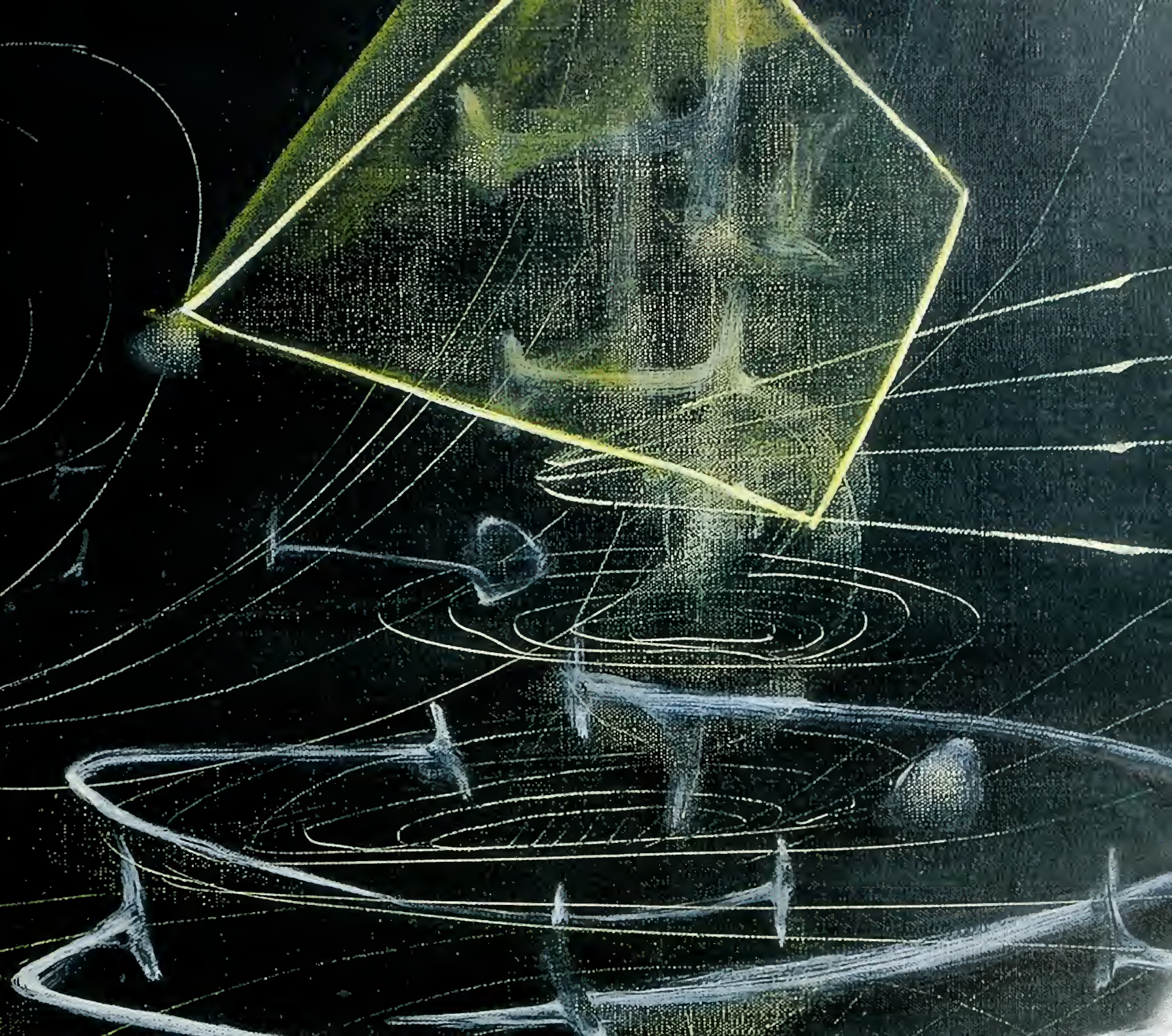
The Sign, 1982, Oil on canvas, 30 x 27 in., Private Collection

No. 52

"Don Qui" series: No se le olvide lo que de lo insulo me tiene prometido... CAPVII, 1985, Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 52 1/3 x 60 1/4 in., Haim Chanin Fine Arts, NYC

No. 53

"Don Qui" series: Y en un panizuelo hallo un buen montecillo de escudos de oro, CAPXXIII, 1985, Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 50 1/3 x 59 7/8 in., Haim Chanin Fine Arts, NYC



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